

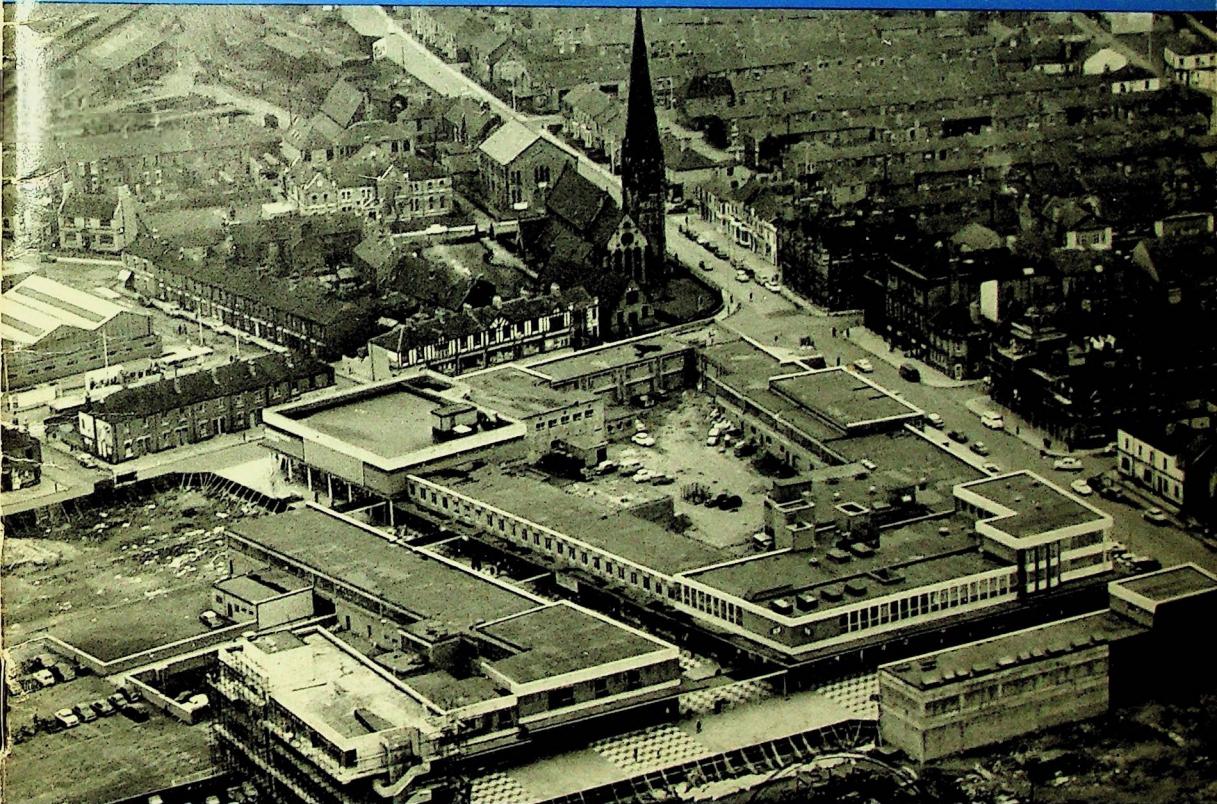
MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

PLANNING
BULLETIN

4

TOWN CENTRES

Current Practice



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MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
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TOWN CENTRES

Current Practice

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Foreword by the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Minister of Transport

This Bulletin offers a selection of photographs of what has actually been achieved in this country in the last decade in putting into practice the principles of modern town centre planning—the segregation of pedestrians and traffic, the attention to town character, the harmonious blending of the new with the best of the old and the general enlivenment of the town centre.

The techniques of town centre renewal are continually developing. The problems are constantly changing. There must be an unremitting search for new solutions to meet new needs.

As the Bulletin says, traffic is the crux of town centre planning. Moreover what happens in the town centre has a wide impact on the town as a whole. The reports, shortly to be published, by Sir Geoffrey Crowther's steering committee and by Mr. C. D. Buchanan's group on the long term problems of traffic in towns will highlight the problems facing us. They should enable us to intensify the search for methods of reconciling the motor car with civilised urban living.

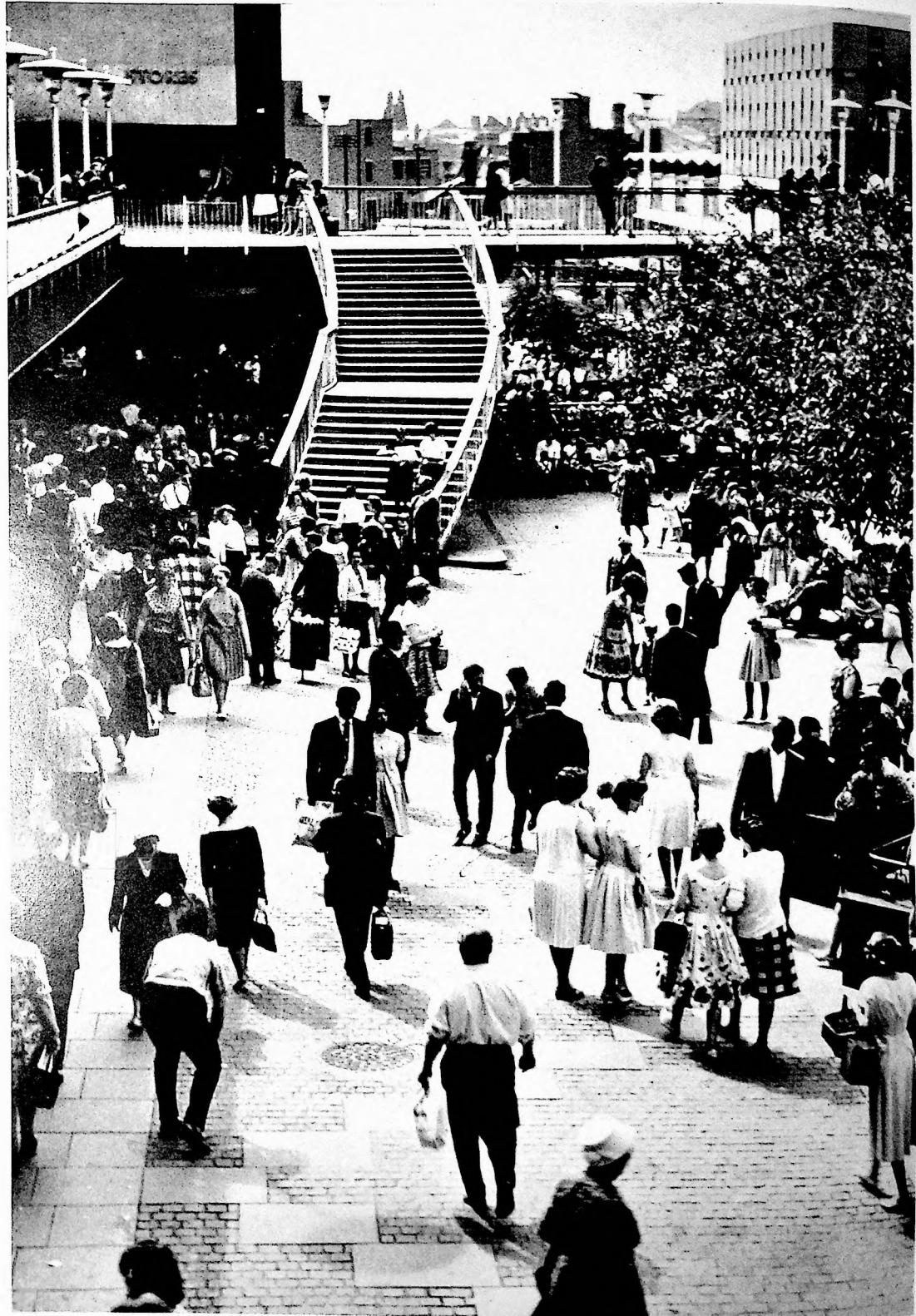
Although the identification and solution of problems will always be on the move, it still seems helpful to illustrate some of the main principles of current planning from recent practice. A presentation of part of what has actually been achieved in the last few years, together with some glimpses of new schemes emerging, will, we hope, help authorities now considering town centre redevelopment.

Each town will need to find its own solution to its renewal problems. But the examples chosen cover such a wide range of communities, in character, in size and in location, that there must be few authorities which could not find here something of relevance to their particular needs.

K. J.
K. J.

Ernest Marples

1 Coventry



Introduction

This bulletin shows what can be achieved in town centre redevelopment. It also illustrates some of the basic elements in town centre planning. The emphasis is on the new forms of building and layout which are now being developed and which have already been applied in some town centre schemes. The aim is to help those authorities who are new to the job by concentrating on what are the essentials of town centre planning today.

This is not a theoretical approach. The bulletin provides a selection of examples of what has already been built and of schemes in preparation.* Some of the examples are taken from the New Towns and town centres rebuilt after war damage. The redevelopment of an old town presents different problems. But the objectives are much the same; to create a town centre that is prosperous, convenient and attractive — something the town can be proud of.

Traffic is the crux of town centre planning. This bulletin is based on the best of current practice. Carrying on from there will be the report of the Minister of Transport's Study Group on the Long Term Problems of Traffic in Towns, which is to be published later this year.

Town centre redevelopment is likely to be on a larger scale than we have seen in the past (outside the blitzed cities), but the ideas in this bulletin do not depend on radical rebuilding at one time of the whole centre. Most can be put into effect as the continual and inevitable process of change and rebuilding takes place *provided* that there is a basic plan, embodying sound principles, to which change can be geared.

The bulletin makes its points through its illustrations. These are divided into six sections: each includes a brief explanation of what the section is about and the points that the pictures illustrate. The pictures are numbered for easy reference and the notes at the end of the bulletin give details of the designers and developers.

The bulletin begins with the idea of the town centre as a place where people can walk about freely and safely. It then goes on to show how traffic can reach the centre, bring people to shop there and deliver goods to the buildings, without dominating the town centre itself. These changes in the layout of the town centre, together with the growing complexity of town centre uses, are bringing about new ideas on function and design. The bulletin shows examples of this trend and illustrates some of the special uses for which the town centre must provide. The town centre can be in many ways an attractive place to live and the bulletin has examples of how new housing can be combined with commercial development. A high standard of design is obviously of the greatest importance, both in the overall conception of the scheme and in all its details. This theme runs throughout the bulletin but the section on 'Character and Quality' touches on some special aspects of this, including the problems of redevelopment in historic towns. The last section shows how all the elements of town centre planning have to be pulled together in a comprehensive plan prepared at the outset. This is a vital and complex job calling for a variety of skills, firm leadership and a realistic sense of objectives. It is as important in the small town as in the large town, and the examples are taken from towns of 10,000 to over 300,000 population.

It is not the purpose of this bulletin to go into any of these subjects in detail. The aim is simply to show how the modern town centre can be good for trade, convenient and efficient for traffic and business, and an enjoyable place for all who use it; and that this is being achieved in many towns in this country. Town centre redevelopment is a great opportunity. This bulletin shows how to make the most of that opportunity.

*Some of the schemes shown are still in their early stages and have not yet been approved by the local authorities concerned or by the Minister. They are included in this bulletin because they illustrate the way in which ideas about town centre planning are now taking shape.



2 Stevenage



3 Basildon

1 Pedestrians first



4 Harlow

This opening section shows what a lively and attractive place the town centre can be, and how the traditional idea of a town centre as a market place and a meeting place can be adapted to the needs of today.

Modern town centres are being built so that the pedestrian can move about freely and safely. That means keeping traffic out of the main shopping streets. This is probably the most important innovation in town centre design since the war. There are many examples. The idea was first tried out on a large scale at Coventry (!).^{*} This shows how the principle can be applied successfully even in the centre of a very large town. It works equally well in smaller towns. Many of the New Towns decided to plan their centre on these lines (2–4).

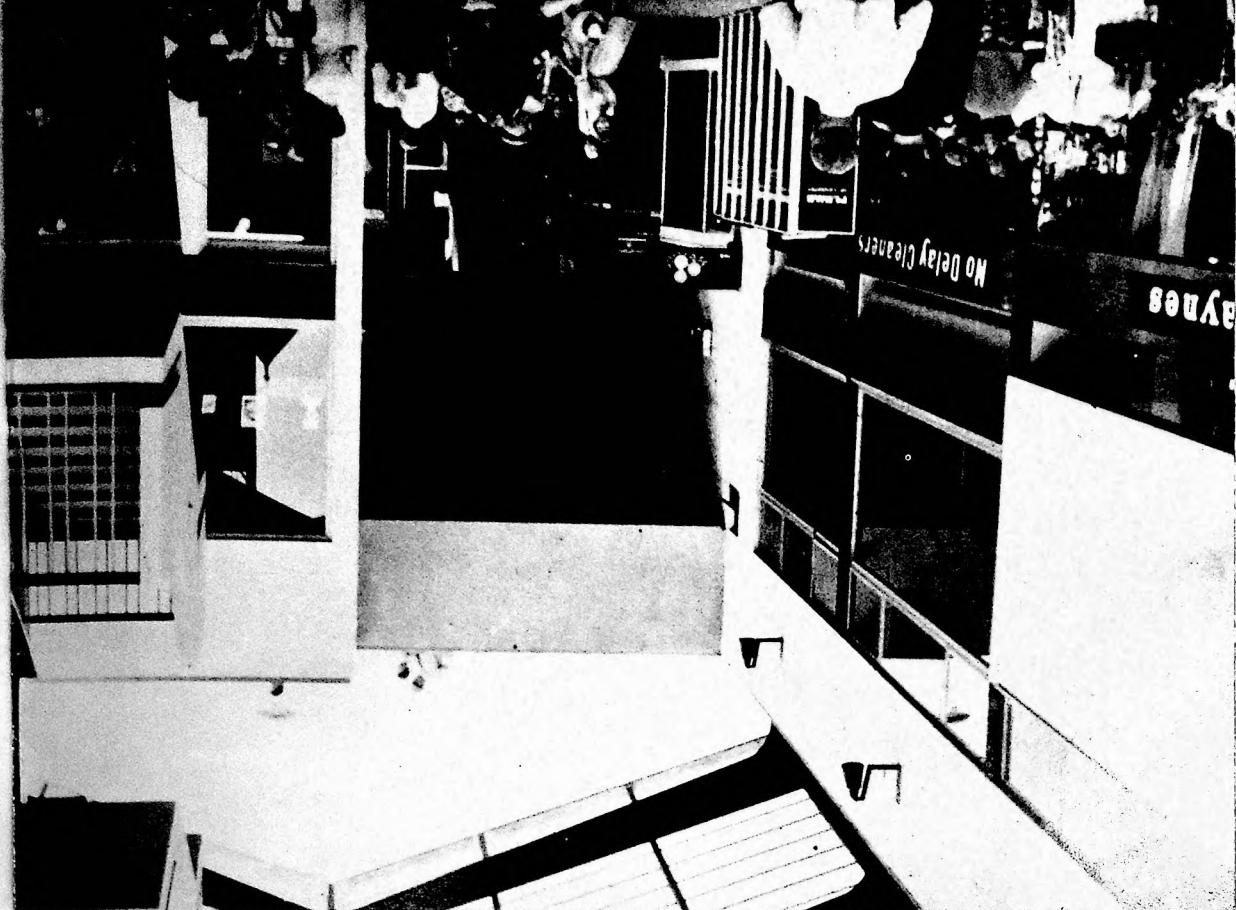
Most town centre redevelopment schemes now being built or in the planning stage are designed on this principle. The new Jarrow shopping centre, shown on the cover of this bulletin, is a striking example. There are many others. Developers now generally accept that this is the right form for the future. The trading interests increasingly share this view;† despite some early misgivings it has been found that trade is not harmed and that customers enjoy being able to do their shopping free from the noise, smell and hazards of heavy traffic. The success of this kind of layout depends, of course, on making full provision for public transport and private car parking with easy access to the centre. This is dealt with in section 2.

*References in brackets are to the numbered illustrations.

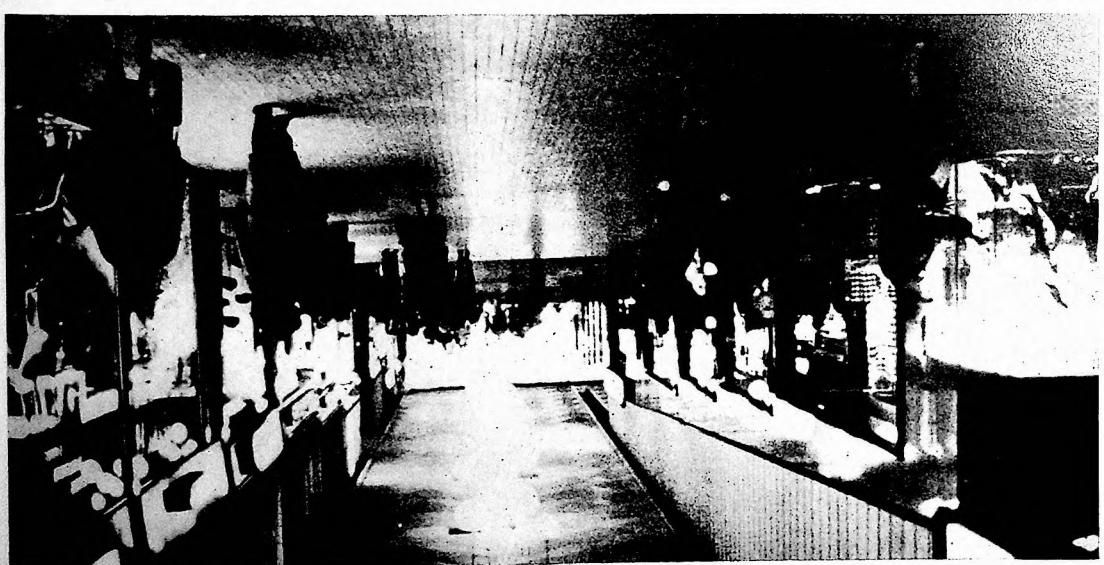
†See, for example, *The Planning of Shopping Centres* published by the Multiple Shops Federation 1963.



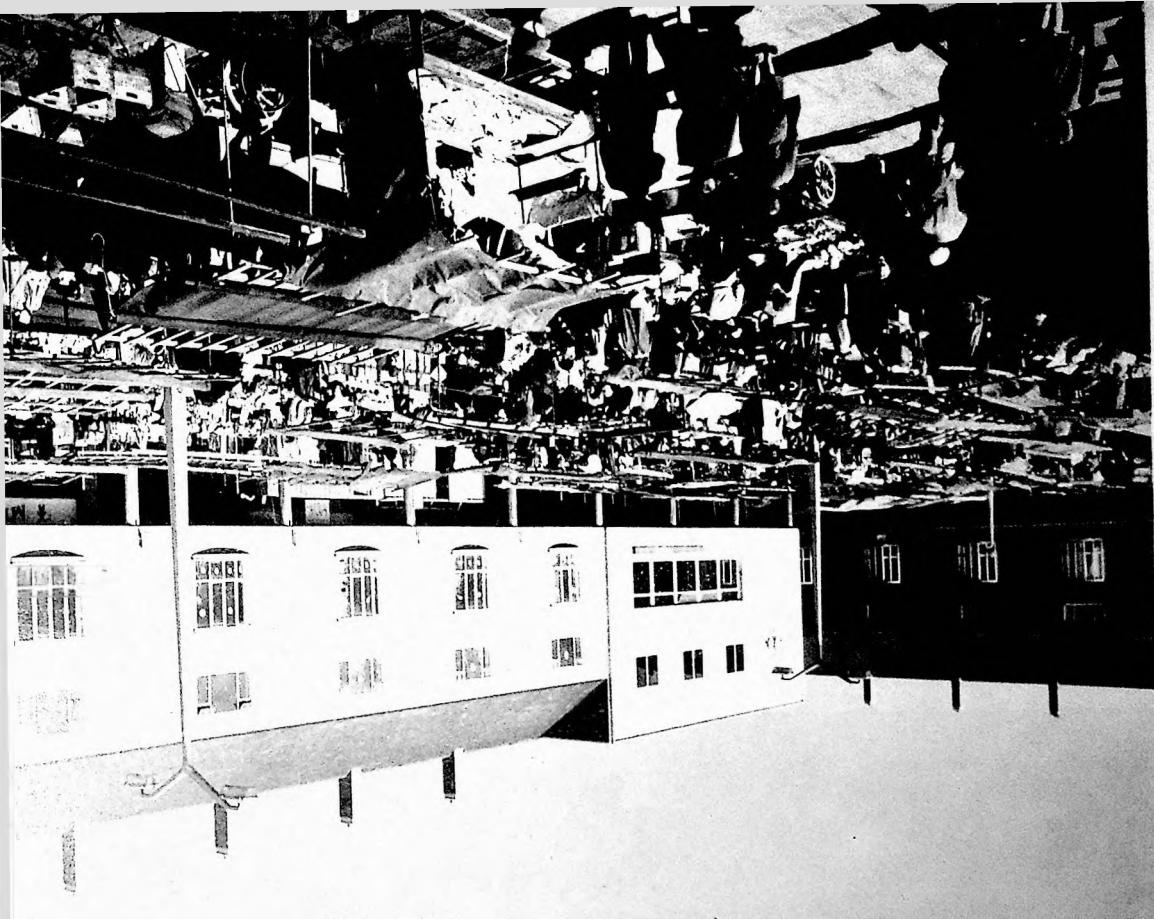
5 Drumchapel



10 Dovetail



11 Mysingnam



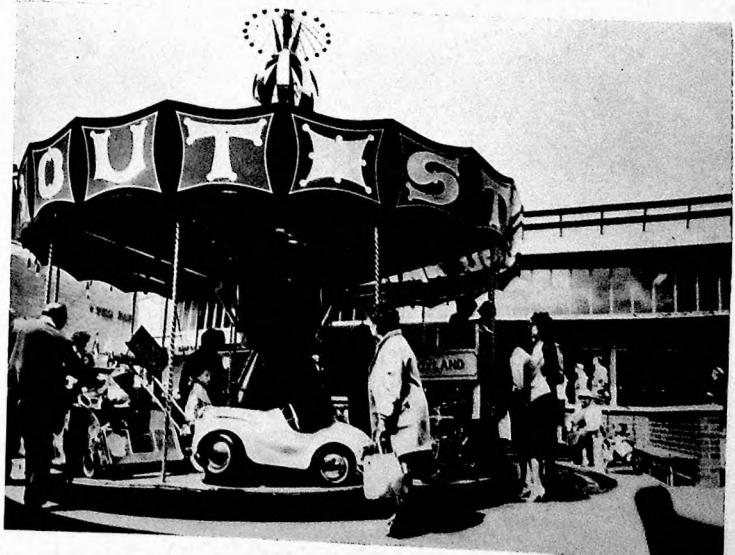
11 London (Lansbury)

A variation on the pedestrian street is the shopping arcade, which has the advantage of 'all weather' shopping (9, 10). The traditional open market is often a centre of traffic congestion but it can equally well be planned for pedestrian use only (11).



12 Crawley

13 Coventry

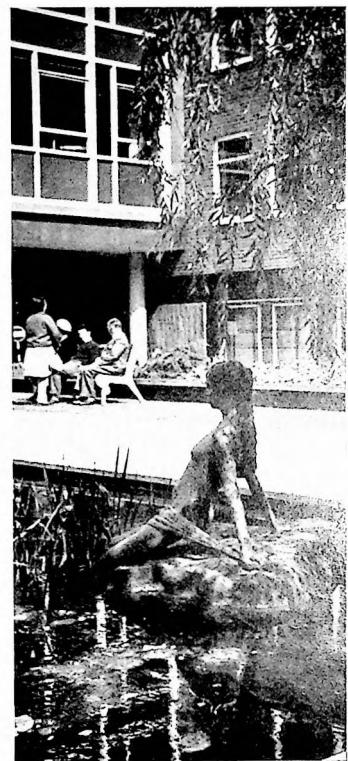


There also needs to be space in the town centre for people to relax (12), space for meetings, concerts, open-air exhibitions, room for children to play (13-16). These are some of the things that make a town centre more than just a shopping centre. It can be a lively, interesting and enjoyable place — a place where pedestrians come first.

14 Coventry

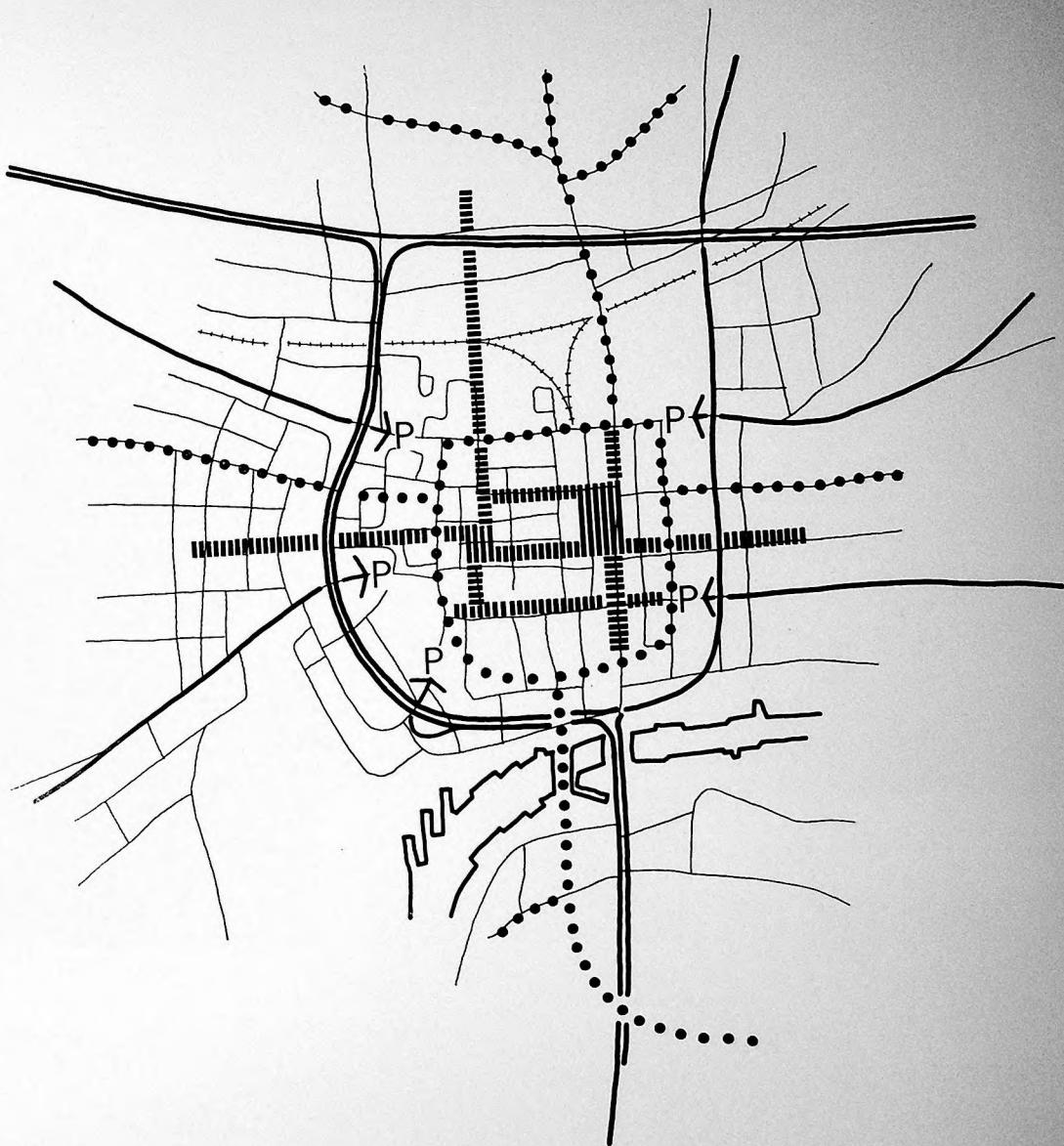


15 Coventry



16 Stevenage





— through and cross town traffic

→ P town centre traffic - cars

• • • • town centre traffic - bus and service vehicles

||||| pedestrian routes

2 Traffic in its place

This section shows how the various kinds of public and private transport bring people and goods to and from the centre, but are kept out of the main shopping area.

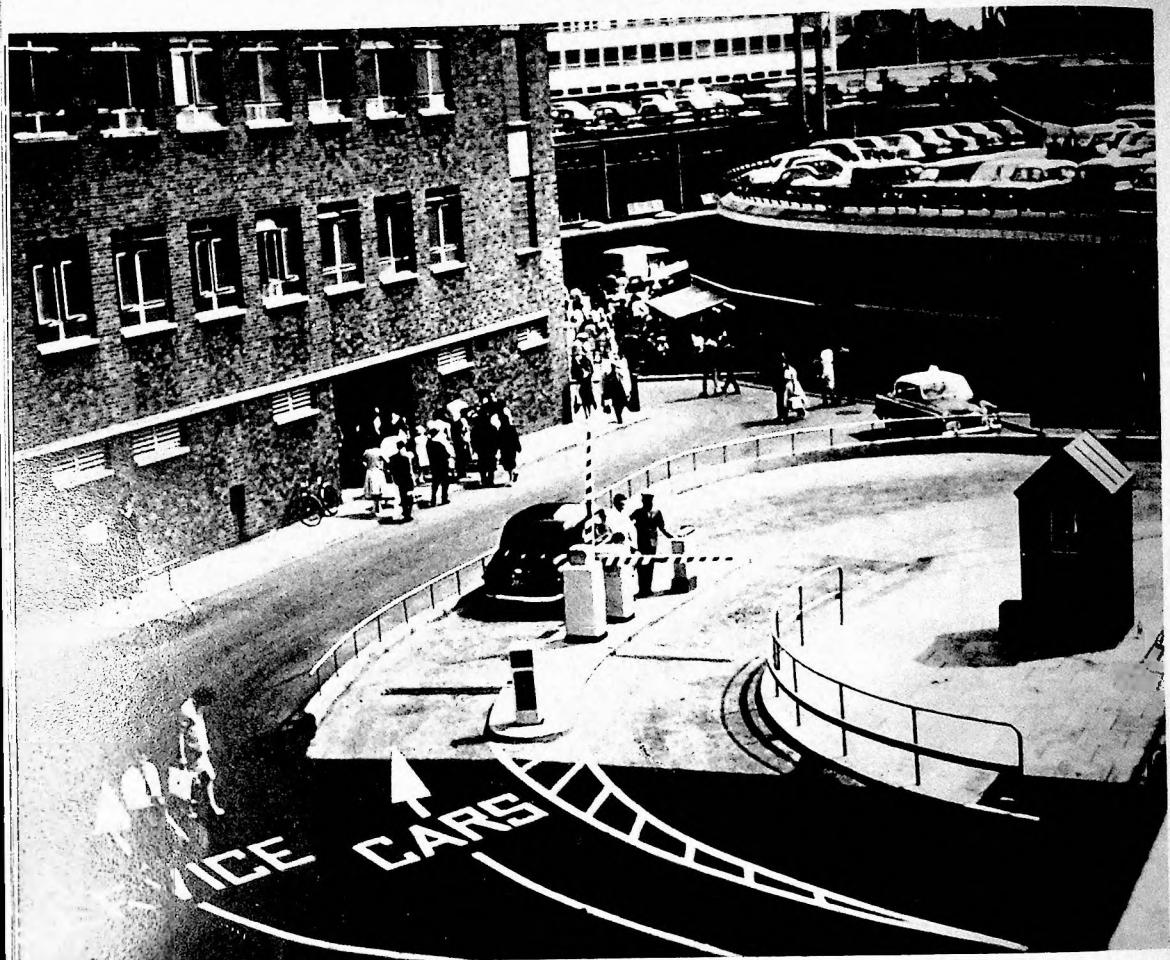
The first essential is to enable through traffic (that is, traffic which is not stopping in the centre) to avoid the centre altogether. This may be possible in the short term by diverting such traffic on to alternative existing routes, but in the longer term the aim will usually be to provide suitable relief roads for the purpose. This is one of the principles illustrated in Planning Bulletin No. 1* from which the diagram (17) is taken.

Public transport needs to get as close as possible to the busiest parts of the town centre. At peak periods buses may be arriving and leaving every minute and thousands of passengers may be on the move. Bus routes, bus stops and bus stations (18) are key factors in town centre planning and have to be tied in closely with the overall plan.

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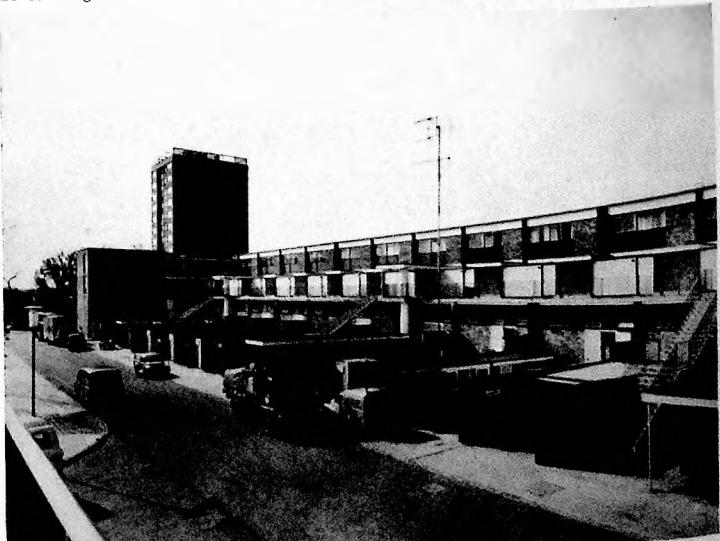
18 Bedford.





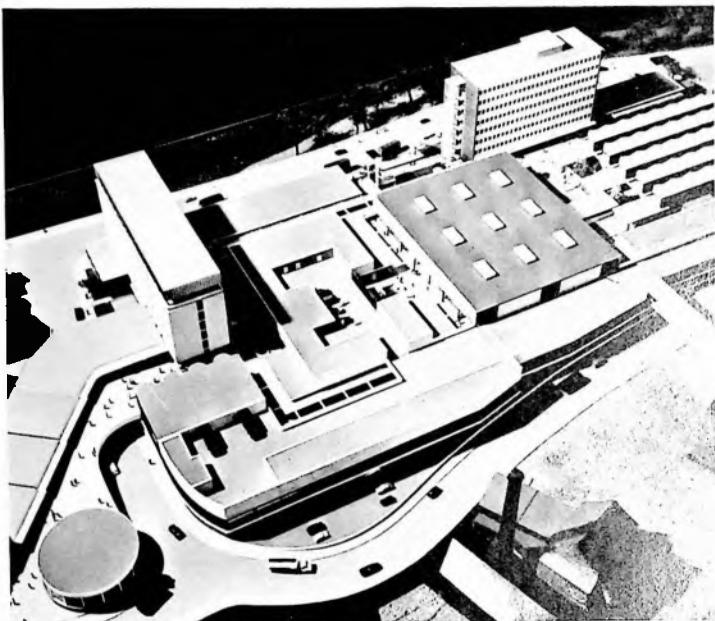
19 Coventry

20 Stevenage



The private motorist needs to be able to park close to the centre but does not have the special access requirements of service traffic, and the two types of traffic must be separated (19). Goods vehicles and delivery vans need direct access to the buildings they serve. Service access may be at ground level at the rear of the buildings (20), at a higher level (21) or underground (22).

21 Shrewsbury.



22 Birmingham



23 Drumchapel

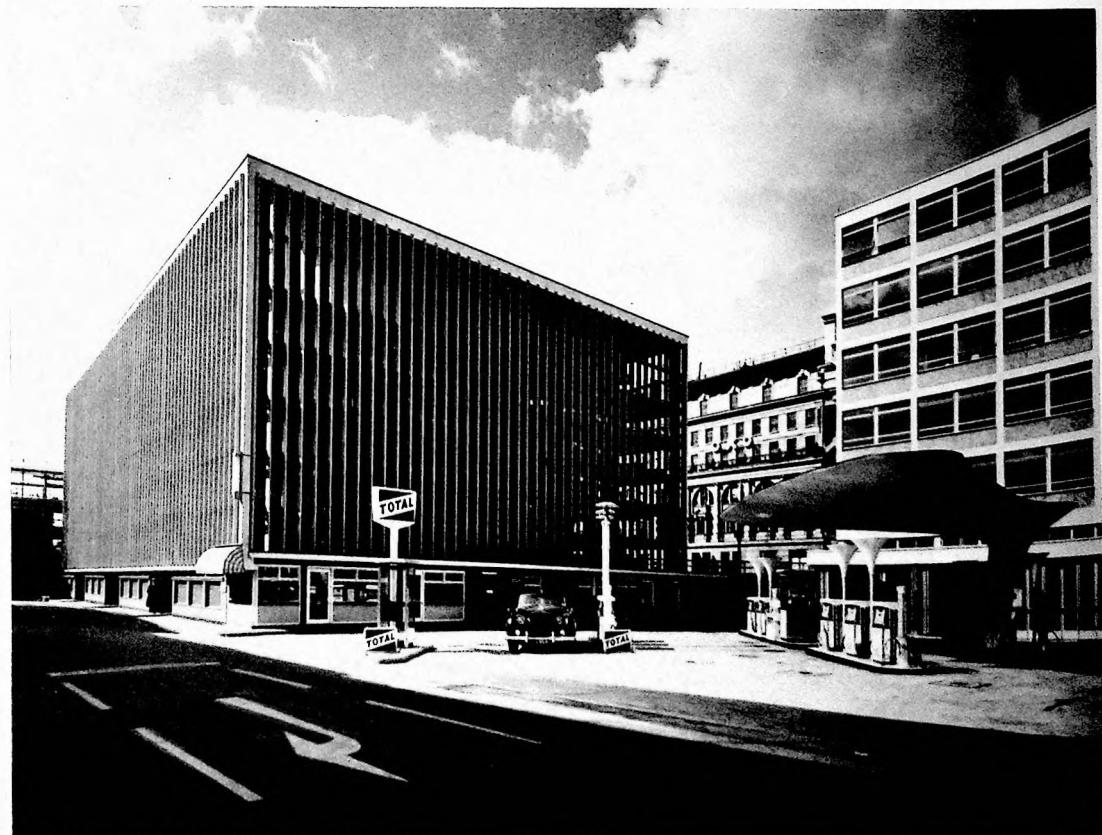


24 Basildon



25 London (Hyde Park)

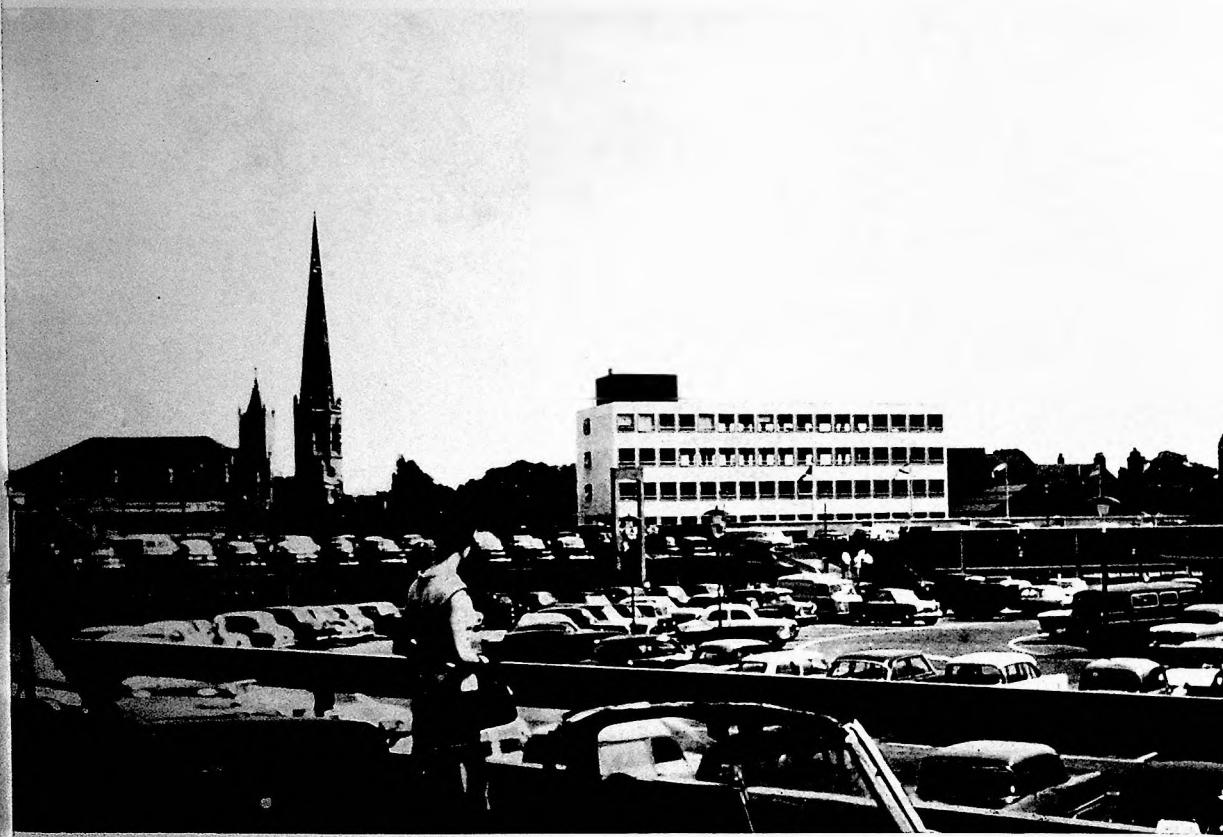
26 London (Southwark Bridge)



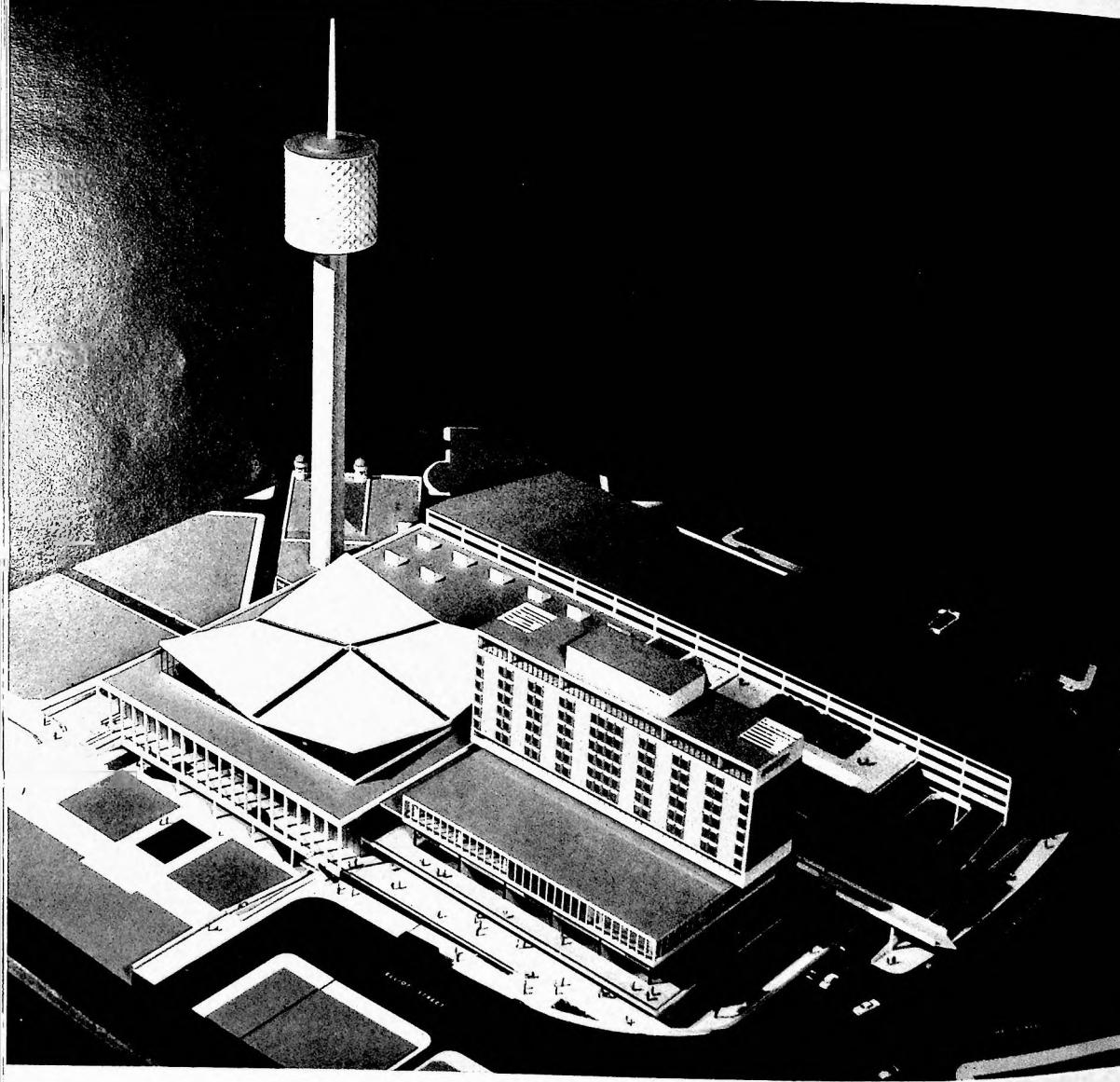
Public car parks are usually at ground level (23) but can be planned for conversion to multi-storey parking later as demand increases (24). Under-ground (25) and multi-storey (26) car parks are becoming familiar in the larger towns. In comprehensive redevelopment schemes roof top parking is possible, and at Coventry (27) a whole system of linked roof-top parking has been provided. The type of parking provision chosen depends on the availability of sites, contour levels, land values and constructional costs. In most towns a variety of provision will be possible and will certainly be needed as car ownership increases.

Many towns are coming to realise that the future prosperity of their town centre, whether or not major redevelopment is in prospect, will depend very largely on providing adequate car parking space. Provision for through traffic, public transport and service vehicles is equally important. But it is even more important to provide for these various needs without gutting the town centre itself and giving it over to traffic at the expense of the pedestrian. This is what is meant by keeping traffic in its place.

27 Coventry



28 Liverpool



3 Buildings and business

The town centre has the greatest concentration and variety of buildings and business activity in the whole town. Land values are high there and suitable sites for new development are scarce. At the same time, there may be little room for the town centre to expand as the town grows and shopping demand increases. As a result of this pressure on land in the central area and the complexity of town centre uses, new building forms are developing.

Some comprehensive schemes are being planned as essentially one great building in which all the different uses are inter-related and form part of the same architectural concept. A redevelopment scheme on these lines for part of the shopping centre of Liverpool (28) includes shops, retail markets, a hotel and a multi-storey car park. A chimney stack for the central heating system which serves the whole development has been designed as a striking landmark with a circular restaurant at the top. A similar scheme now being built at Shrewsbury (29) shows that the same trend can be seen in smaller towns. The new market buildings at Sheffield (31-33) are another example of this; the sectional drawing (30) also shows how various uses are planned together at different levels.

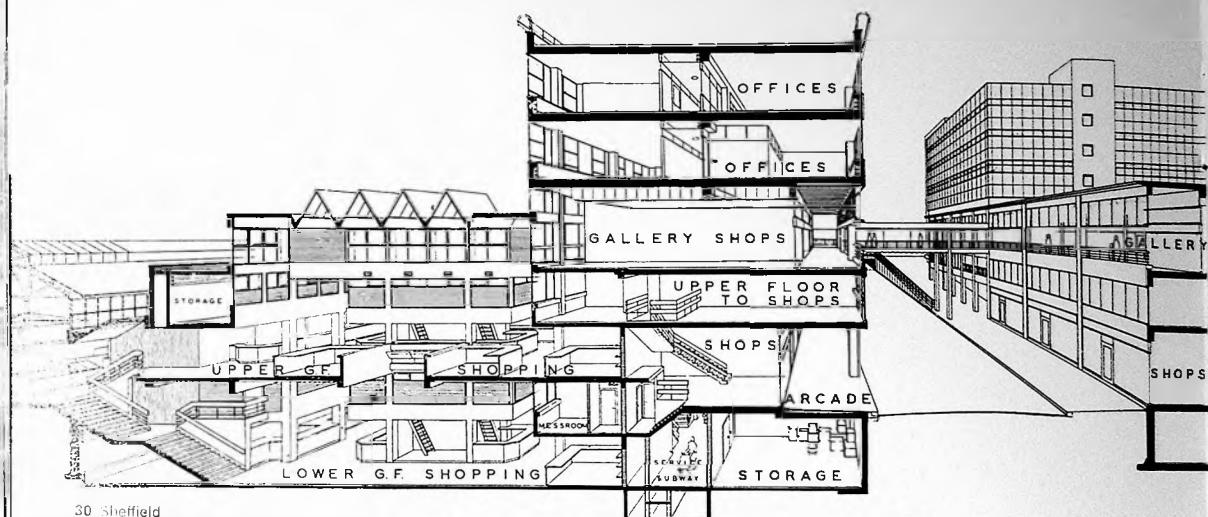
29 Shrewsbury



MEAT & FISH
MARKET

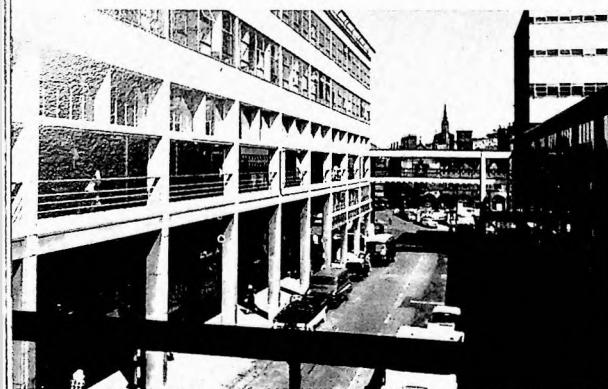
Castle Hill Retail
Market

ASSOCIATED PRIVATE
DEVELOPMENT



30 Sheffield

33

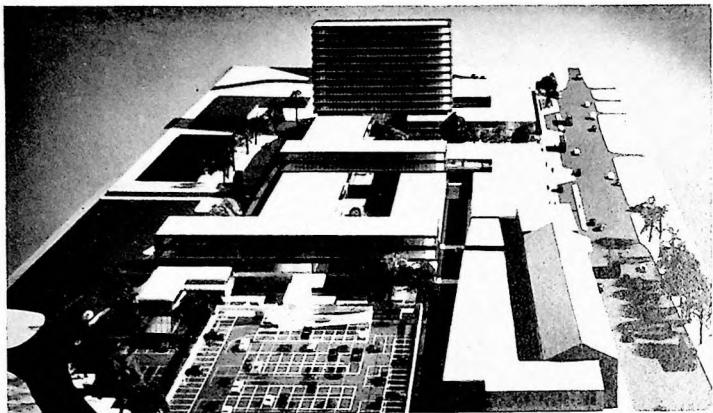


32



The town centre is much more than a shopping centre. But if it lost its attraction as a shopping centre it could hardly survive as a town centre in the wider sense. Shopping is the mainstream of town centre life and takes many forms, as can be seen for example in the new schemes at Feltham (34), Billingham (35) and Bangor (36).

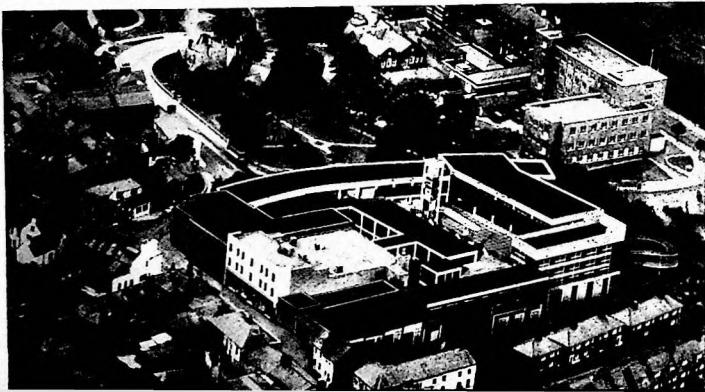
34 Feltham

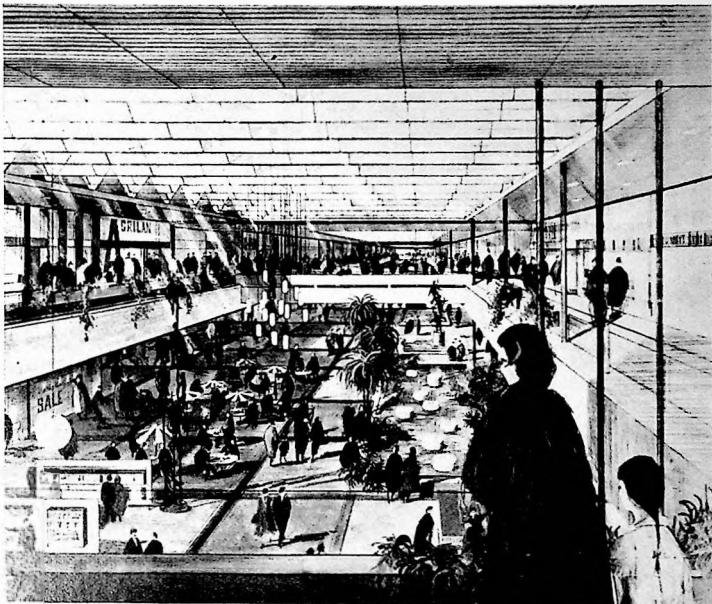


35 Billingham



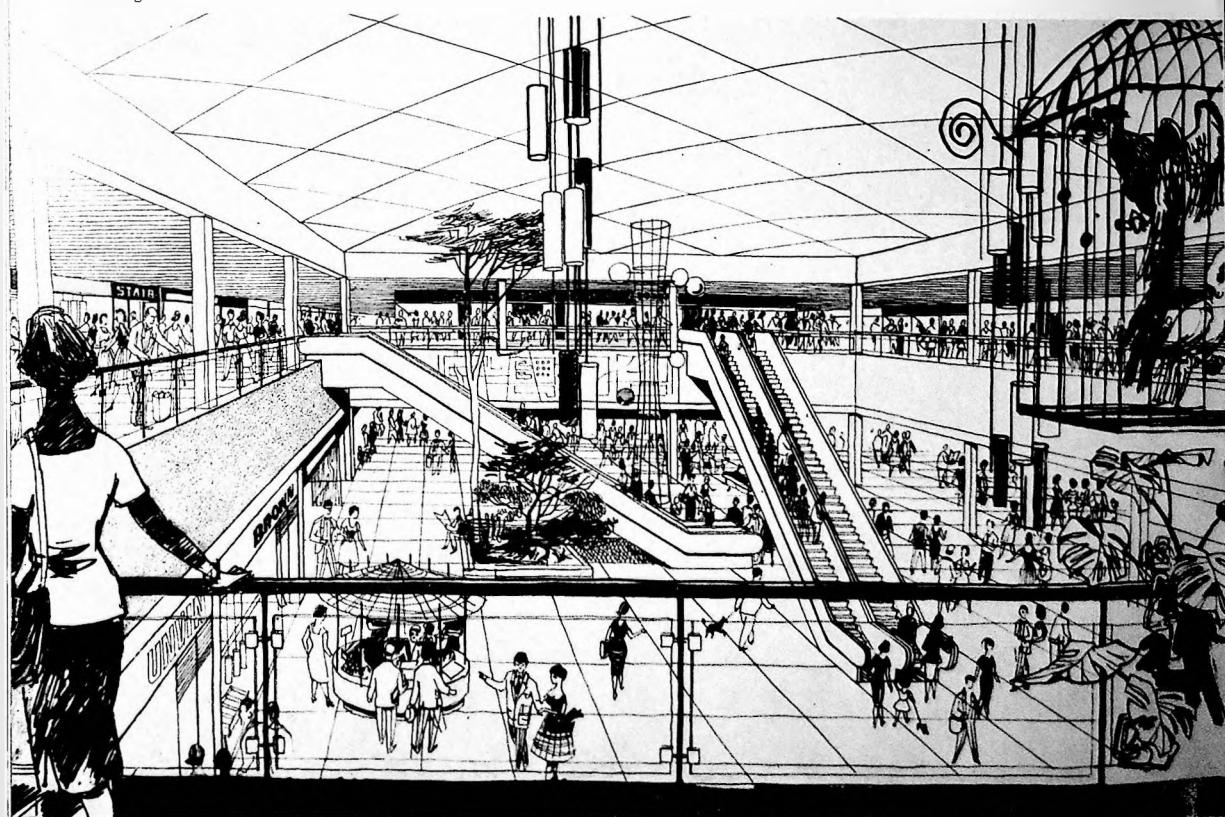
36 Bangor





37 London (Elephant and Castle)

38 Birmingham



One of the most striking developments in shopping services is the new look for the traditional covered market. This is now being developed on a much bigger scale and in multi-level form. The new shopping centres under construction at the Elephant and Castle in London (37) and the Bull Ring in Birmingham (38) show how a great variety of shopping facilities can be brought together under one roof, where there is a place for both the department store or supermarket and the smaller trader offering a more specialised or personal service. In all types of shopping centre there needs to be provision for wide variety and flexibility in accommodation and layout to meet the varied and always changing requirements of modern retailing.

Offices are needed in the town centre and can often use the space over one or two storey shops (39, 40). This can help to strengthen the architectural character of the centre, besides increasing the weekday shopping demand. Banks usually need a ground floor site; at Hemel Hempstead they are grouped together behind the main shopping frontage (41).

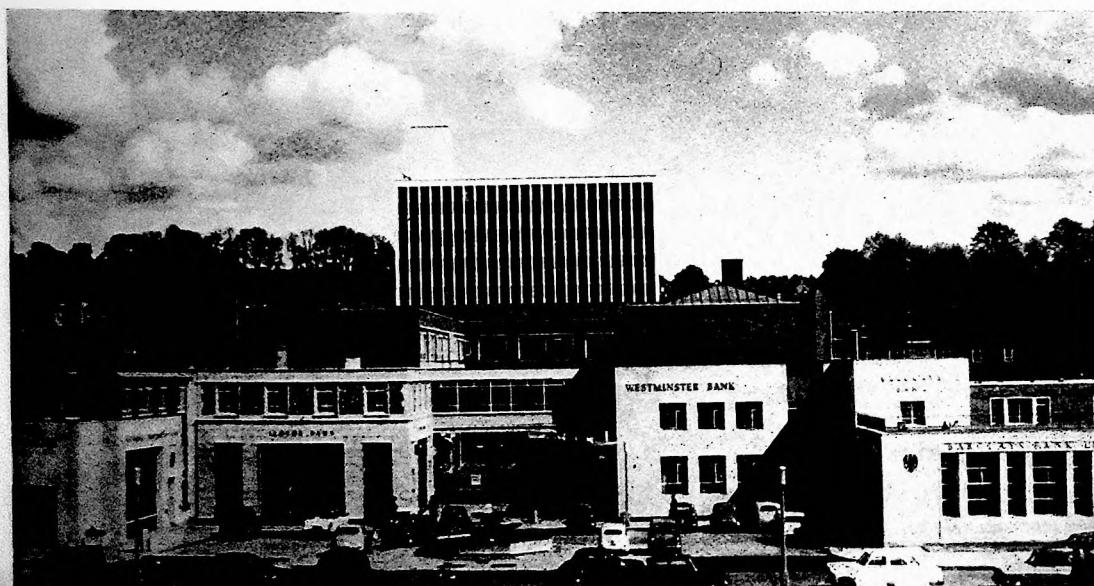
39 Coventry



40 Swindon



41 Hemel Hempstead



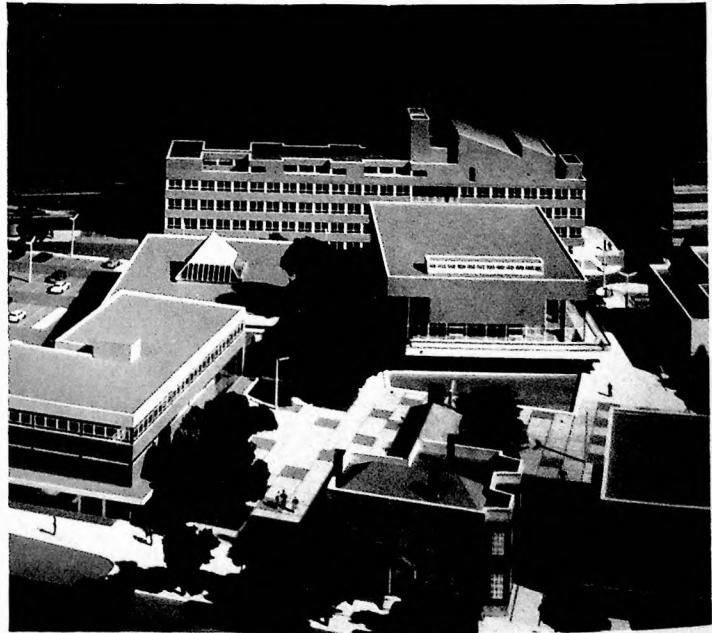


42 Plymouth

43 Eastbourne



44 St. Albans



Public buildings such as Council offices (42) and theatres (43) are part of the social and civic function of the town centre and they need to be tied in together with the other activities of the centre rather than set apart in a separate precinct. The new local authority buildings at St. Albans (44) will include shops as well as offices, and the new Plymouth Council offices (42) are linked to the town centre by the pattern of pedestrian movement and public open space.

The town centre has to be able to accommodate a great variety of special uses — from hotels (45) to bowling alleys (46), libraries (47) to dance halls (48). They can all contribute to the interest and attraction of the centre, but they all have special needs in terms of siting, access and design. It is as a result of integrating these special needs that some of the most exciting developments in town centre planning and design are now taking shape. Town centres are changing fast and there is great scope here for new ideas.

Over concentration of retail, business and other uses at the centre runs the risk of congestion. Some types of use do not need a central location, and the scope for extending and improving neighbourhood centres should not be overlooked in planning for the well balanced growth of the town. The new shopping centre at Cowley will serve to take some of the pressure off Oxford city centre; it will include flats as well as shops and is illustrated in the next section (58, 59).

45 Burnley



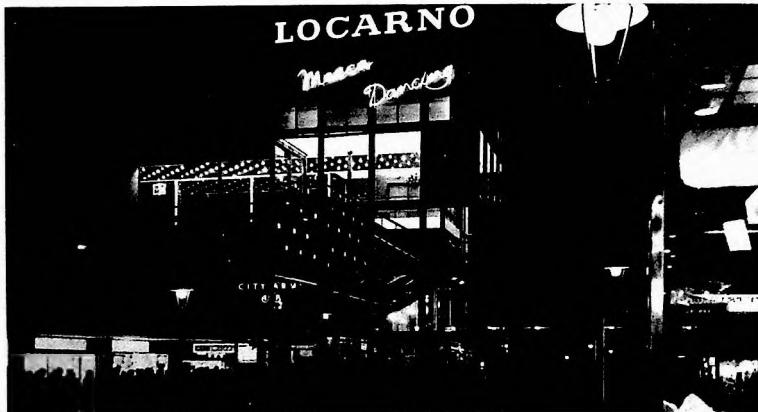
46 Jarrow

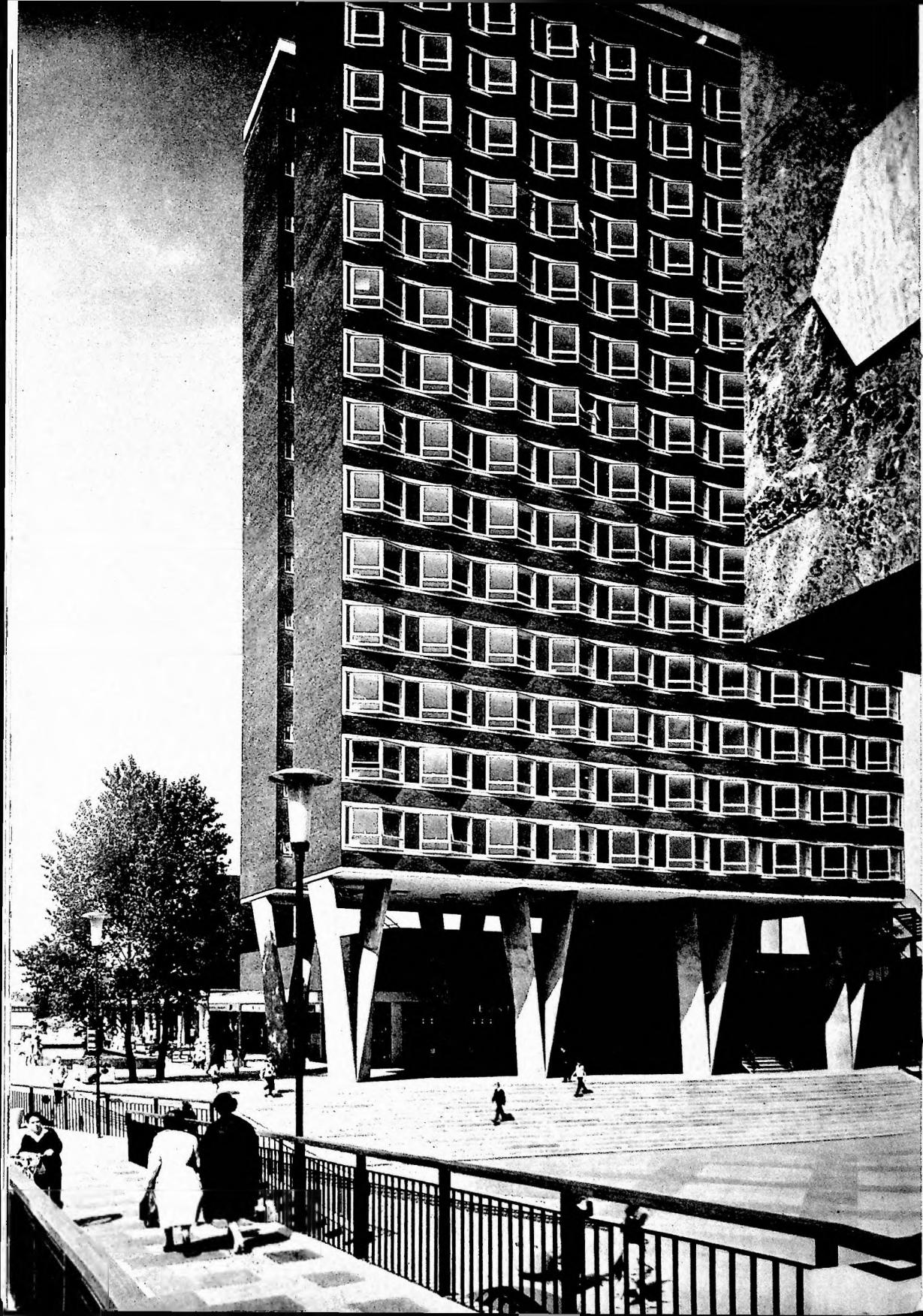


47 Norwich



48 Coventry



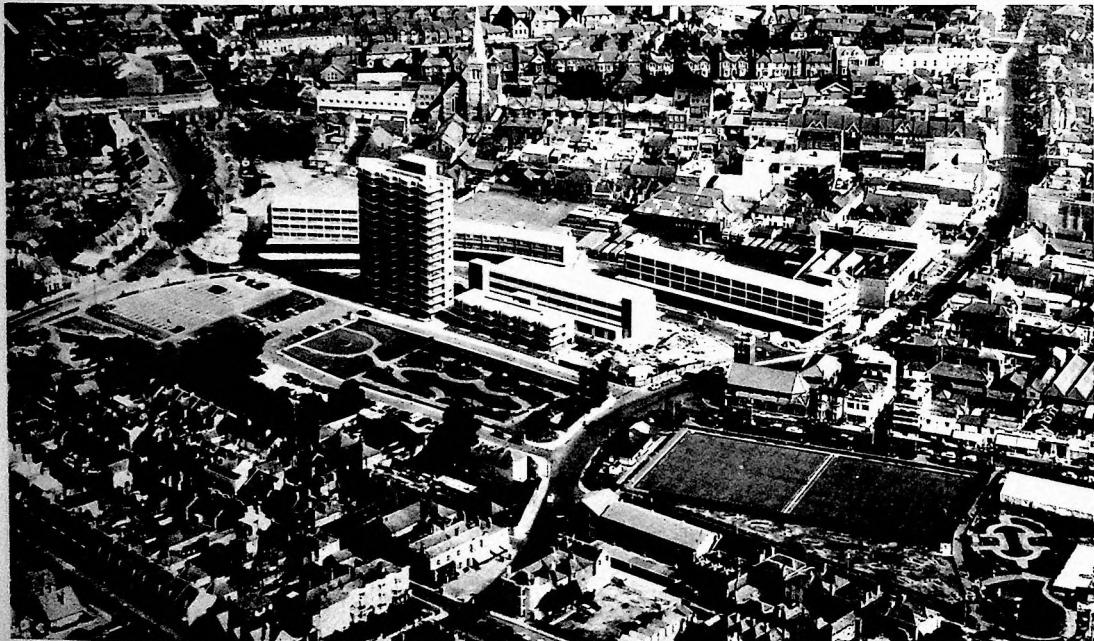


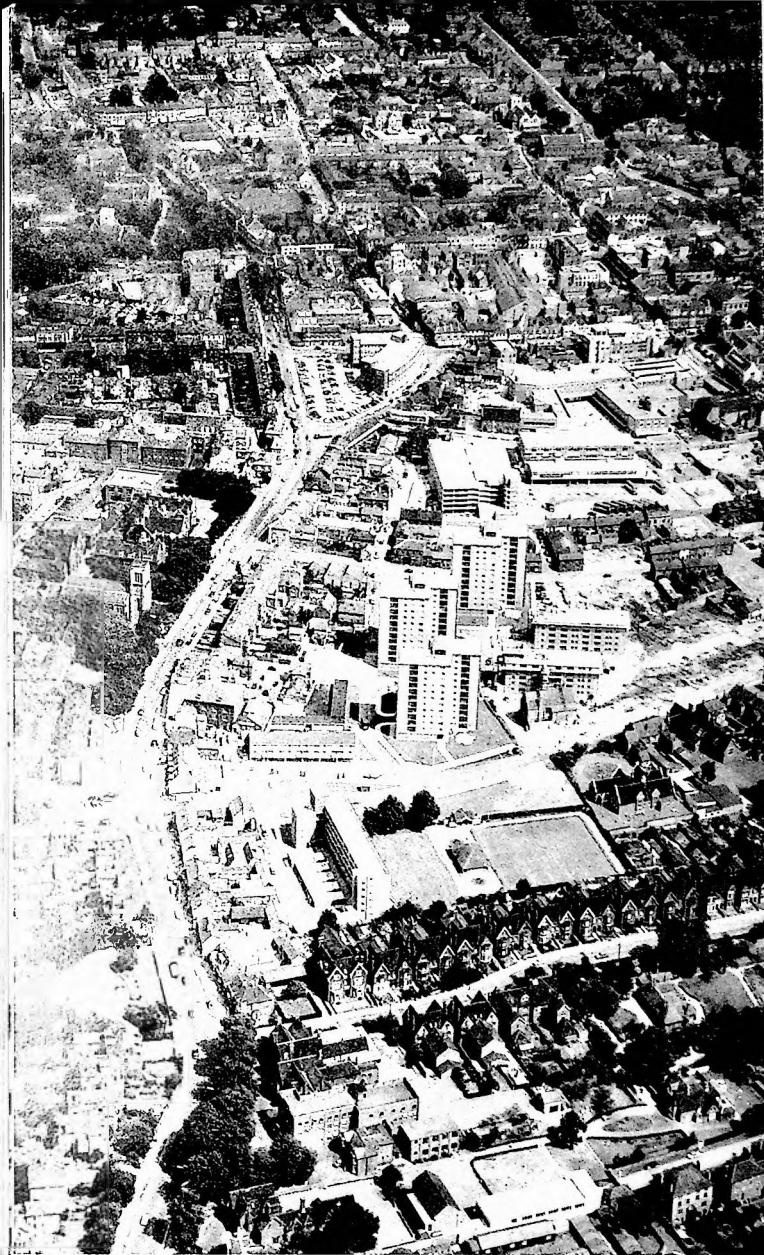
4 Living in the centre

The town centre can be in many ways an attractive place to live. But in most large towns the number of people living in the centre has been declining for many years. Houses have been converted into offices; living rooms over shops have been turned into storage space. Redevelopment gives an opportunity to attract people back into the centre to live, and there are signs that people would like to live there, given good conditions.

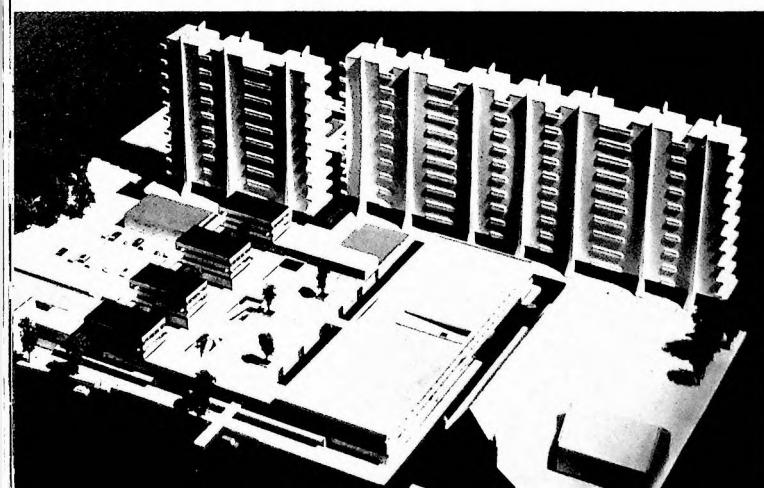
This adds to the vitality of the centre. It gives the place some life and light in the evening. Those who live there have the town centre shops, transport and entertainments at their doorstep. It will often shorten their journey to work. For people without young families, and for people living singly, the town centre can be a good place to live — interesting and convenient.

50 Bognor Regis





51 Bedford



52 Glasgow

Residential development in the centre can also make a great contribution to architectural scale and quality – from the dramatic tower block (49-52) to the more domestic scale of flat over shop and maisonnette (53-55).

53 Haverhill

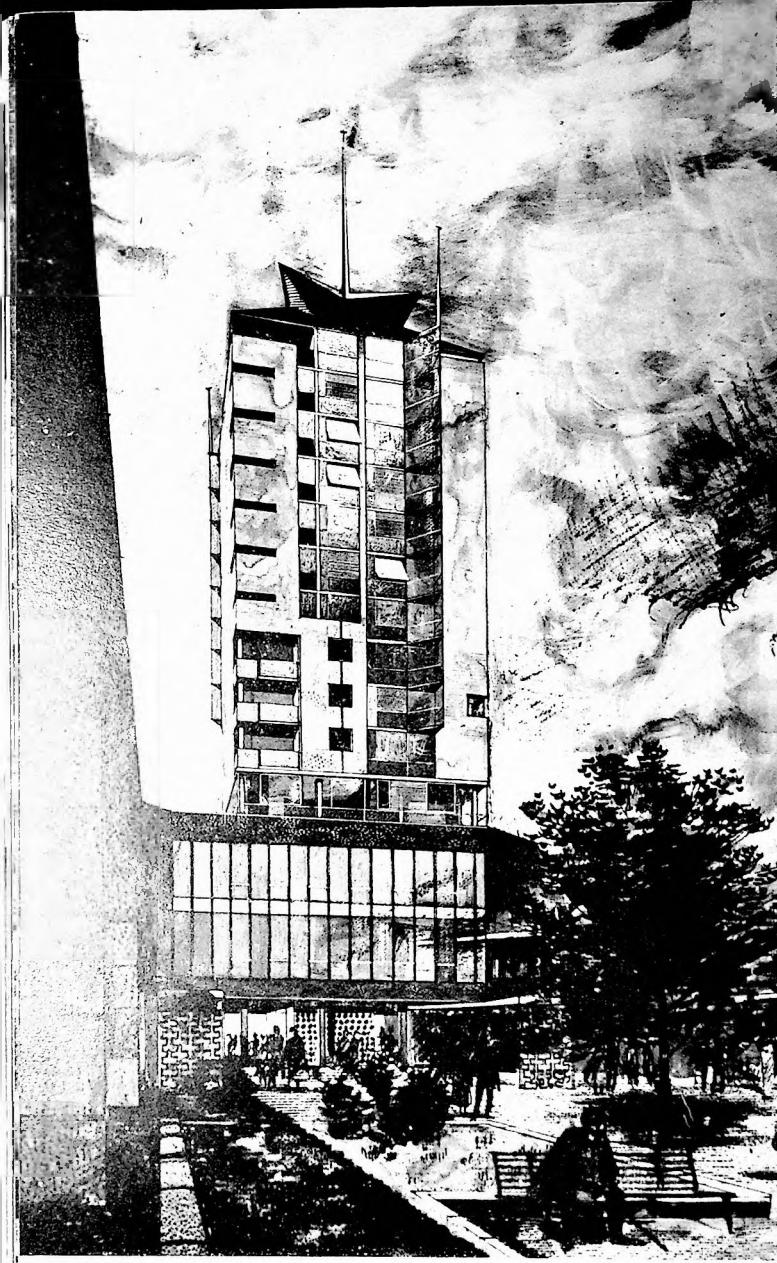


54 Gloucester



55 Stevenage





56 Coventry

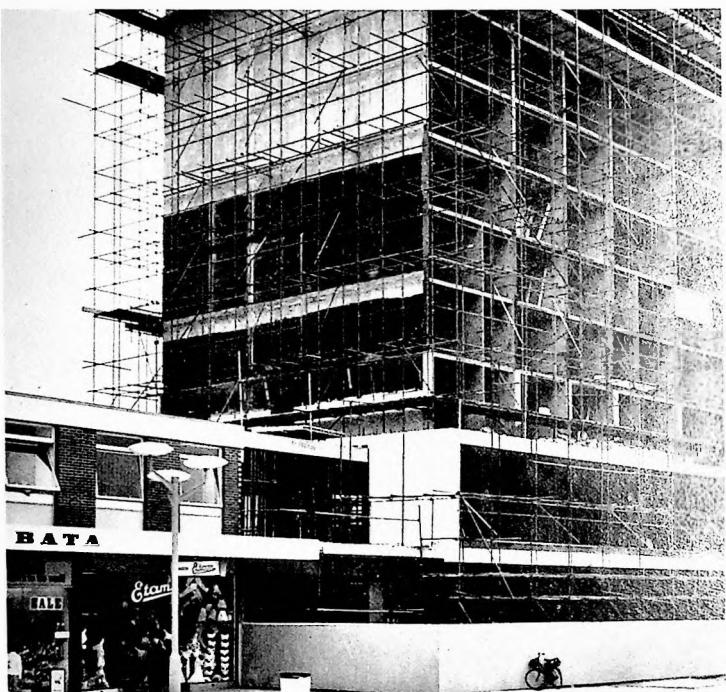


57 Birmingham

In towns and cities where problems of land shortage and overspill are an obstacle to redevelopment, it makes very good sense to use the 'air space' over shops for new housing. The Smithfield Way Terminal block in the Coventry shopping centre (56) is being built by private developers to a detailed design prepared by the city architect: the flats will be let or leased to private tenants. The Yardley District Centre scheme in Birmingham (57) is to be developed as a shopping centre by private developers but the City Corporation have taken a building under lease to build a ten storey block of flats above it. The Cowley centre at Oxford is another example now taking shape (58, 59).

These examples show that living in the centre is not an outmoded way of life; indeed it looks like coming back into favour; and that will be a good thing for the town centre.

58 Cowley



59 Cowley



60 Canterbury



5 Character and quality

The fact that redevelopment is needed in the town centre does not mean that it can or should be torn apart. Most towns have some valuable features which have survived the constant changes of town centre development — narrow pedestrian ways remain, unexpected open spaces have been retained and historic buildings preserved. An essential element of planning for redevelopment is an assessment of what should be kept intact.

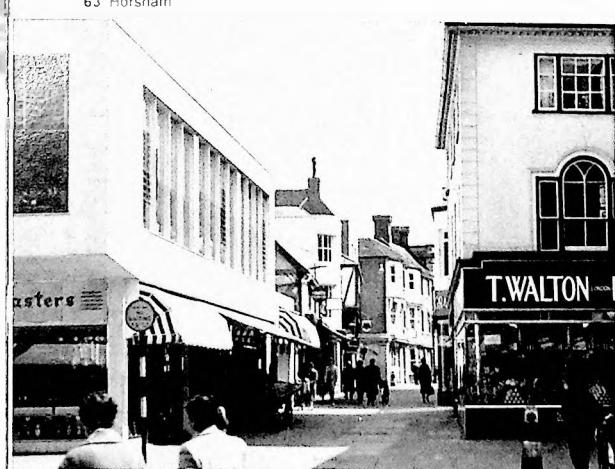
When new building takes place near buildings of architectural or historic importance, it is clearly necessary to ensure that it is sympathetic in scale, materials and colour. Town centres acquire their character through a process of continual change and modern development can add to that (60-64).

61 Chichester





62 Cambridge



63 Horsham

64 Epping



In some towns the main objective may be to preserve the town centre so far as possible in its present form. But the pressure of traffic and congestion in these historic centres is such that a process of adaptation is essential. The aim may be to disturb the historic part of the centre as little as possible, but even so this may involve some fairly radical rethinking — streets may need to be closed, traffic diverted. In the long term it may be the right decision to ease some of the other pressures and provide space for new shopping facilities and car parking outside the historic centre but if possible close to it so that the old buildings remain attractive for the smaller type of specialist shop, restaurants, professional offices and similar uses. It may also regain its attraction as a residential quarter.

Tall buildings can add greatly to the scale and significance of the centre, or they can destroy its balance and cohesion. Some of the examples shown earlier demonstrate the striking contribution which tall buildings can make. But these are all the result of very careful site selection and layout. Few towns, other than the major cities, are likely to have a large number of tall buildings and it is less a question of devising elaborate general controls than of studying most carefully the effect of individual tall buildings and getting the best from them. Height is only one factor: siting, bulk, relation to other development and existing buildings, colour, materials and night effect are all significant.

Design quality is reflected just as much in the detailing as in the overall concept—in the 'floorscape' (65), the reappearance of traditional features such as clock towers (66, 67) and bandstands (65), in the use of sculpture (66, 68), water (69, 70), and in the effect by night (71). All these contribute to the success of the town centre: they distinguish it from other towns and enhance its character and individuality.

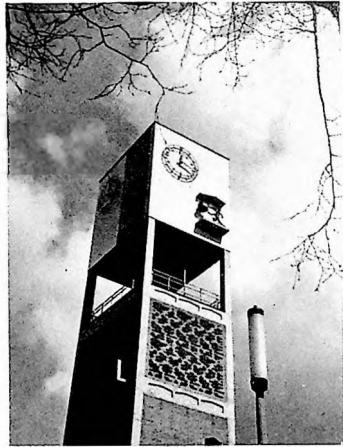
65 Crawley



66 Stevenage

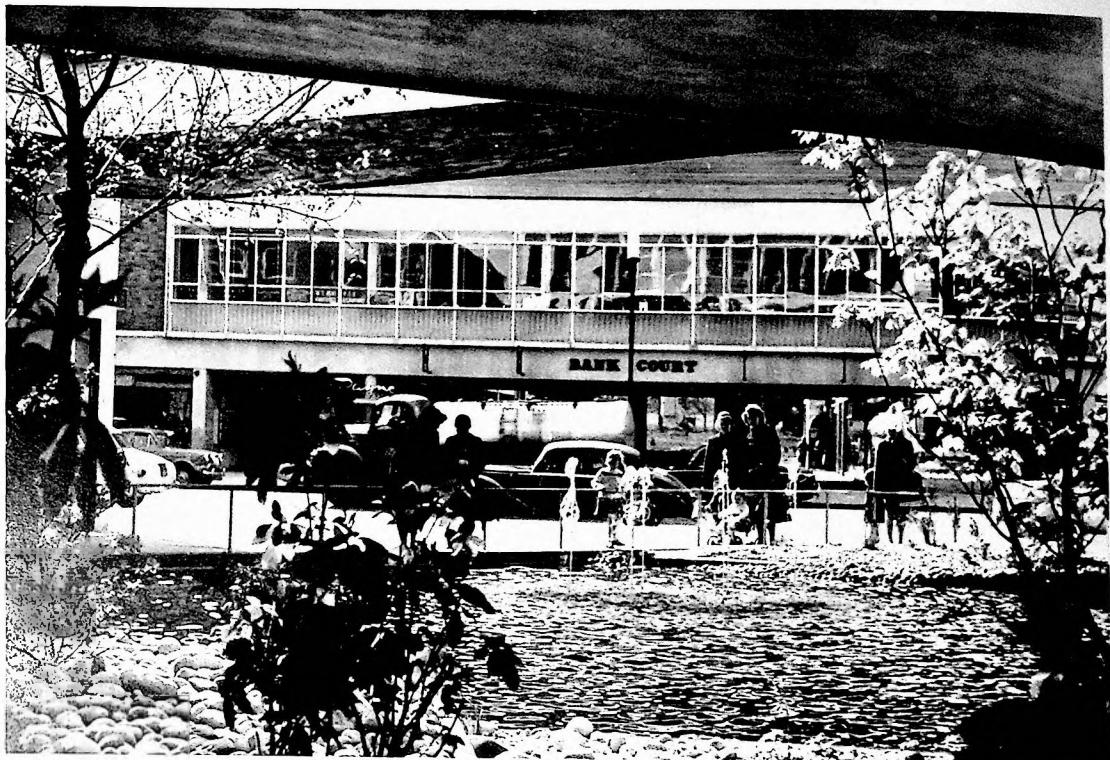


67 Shipley



68 Gloucester





69 Hemel Hempstead

70 Hemel Hempstead

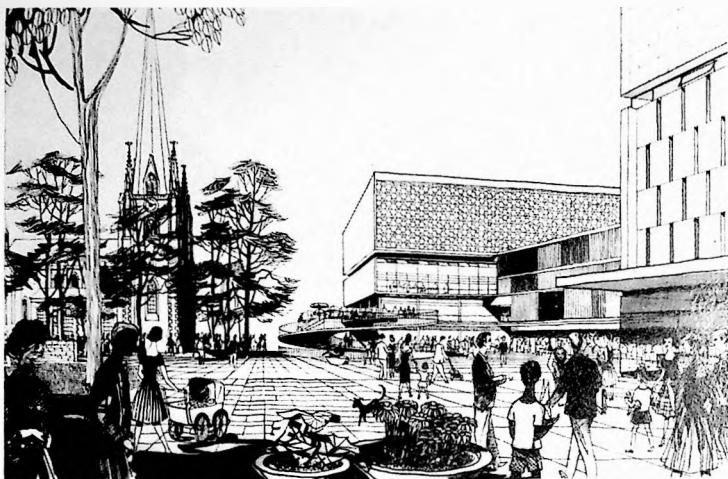


71 Stevenage

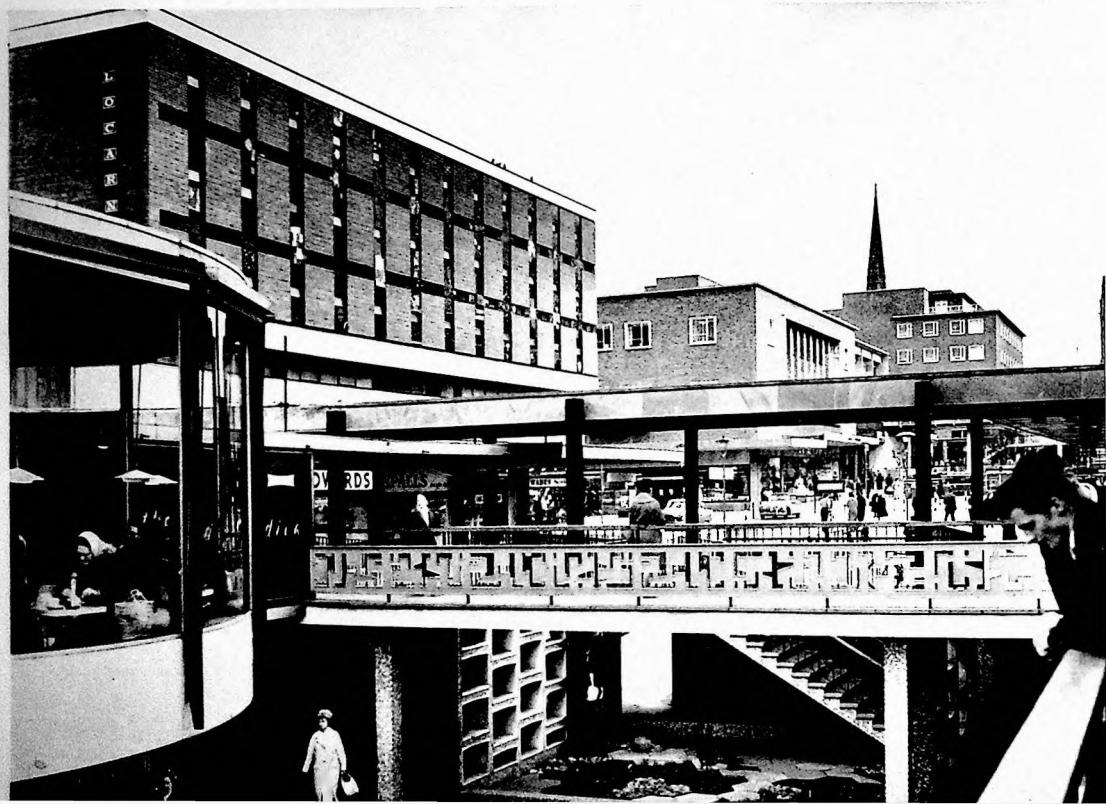


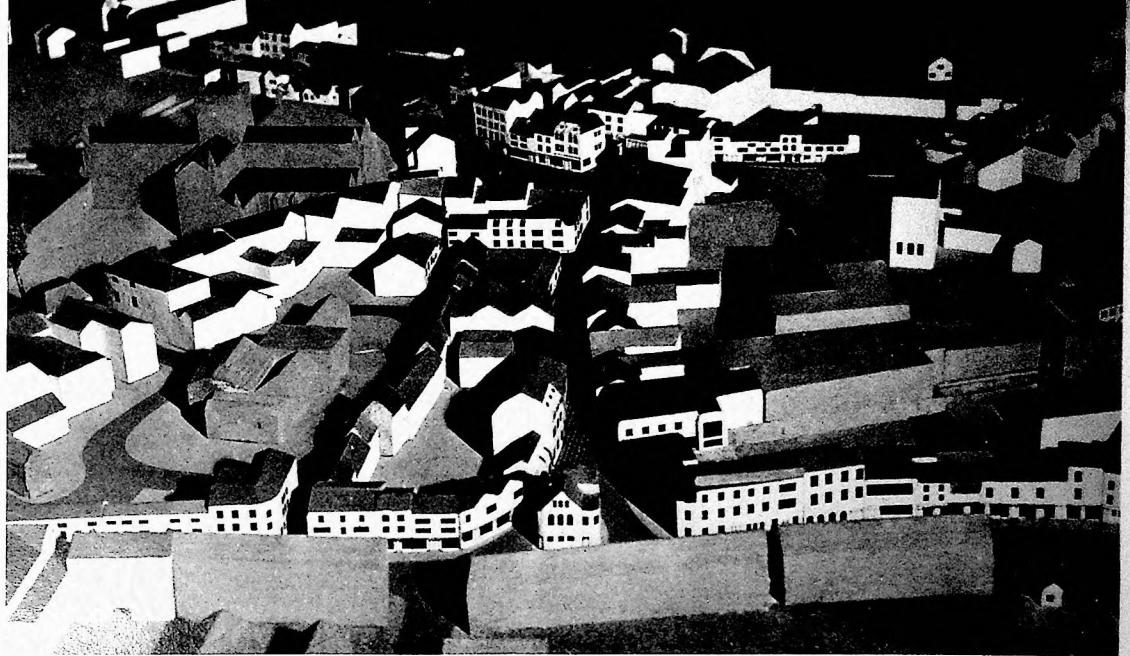
Town centres today are undergoing more rapid and more sweeping changes than at any time in the past. As redevelopment gathers pace a new idiom of town centre design can be seen evolving — something entirely modern, distinctive and enjoyable (72, 73).

72 Birmingham

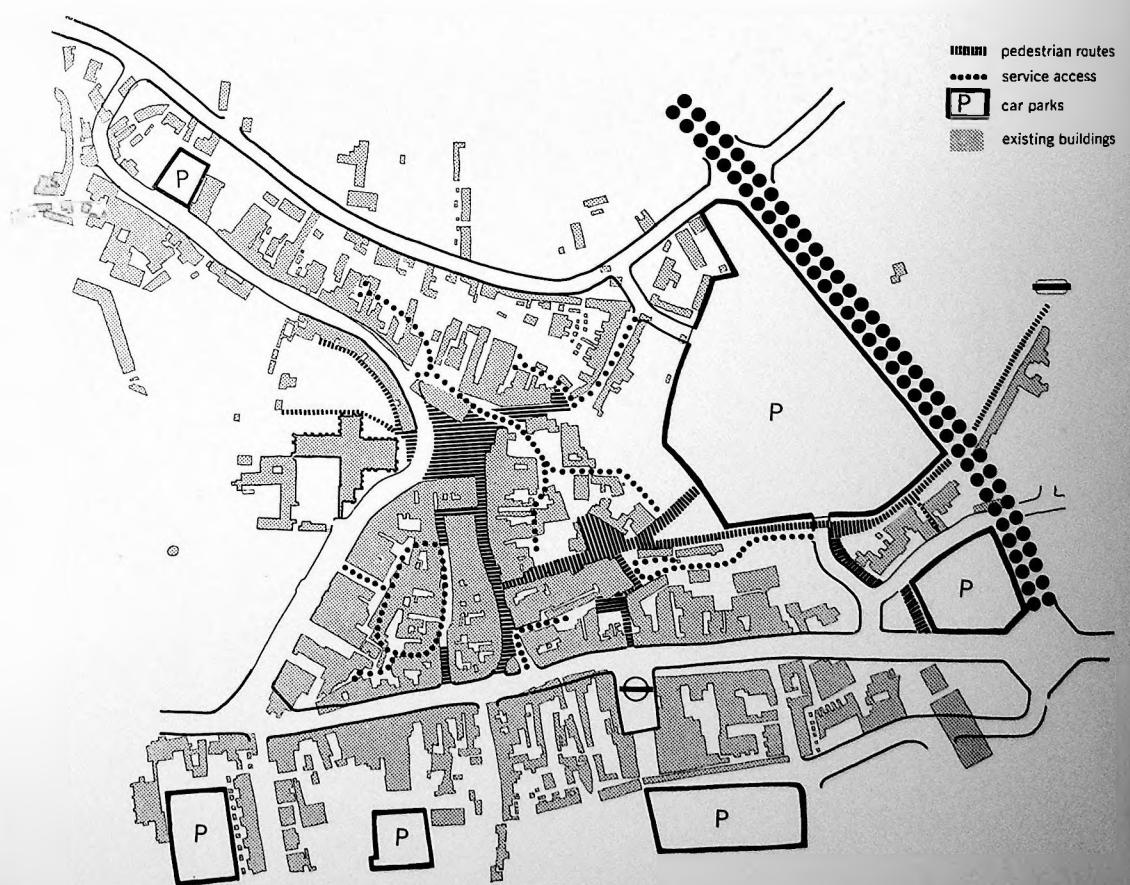


73 Coventry

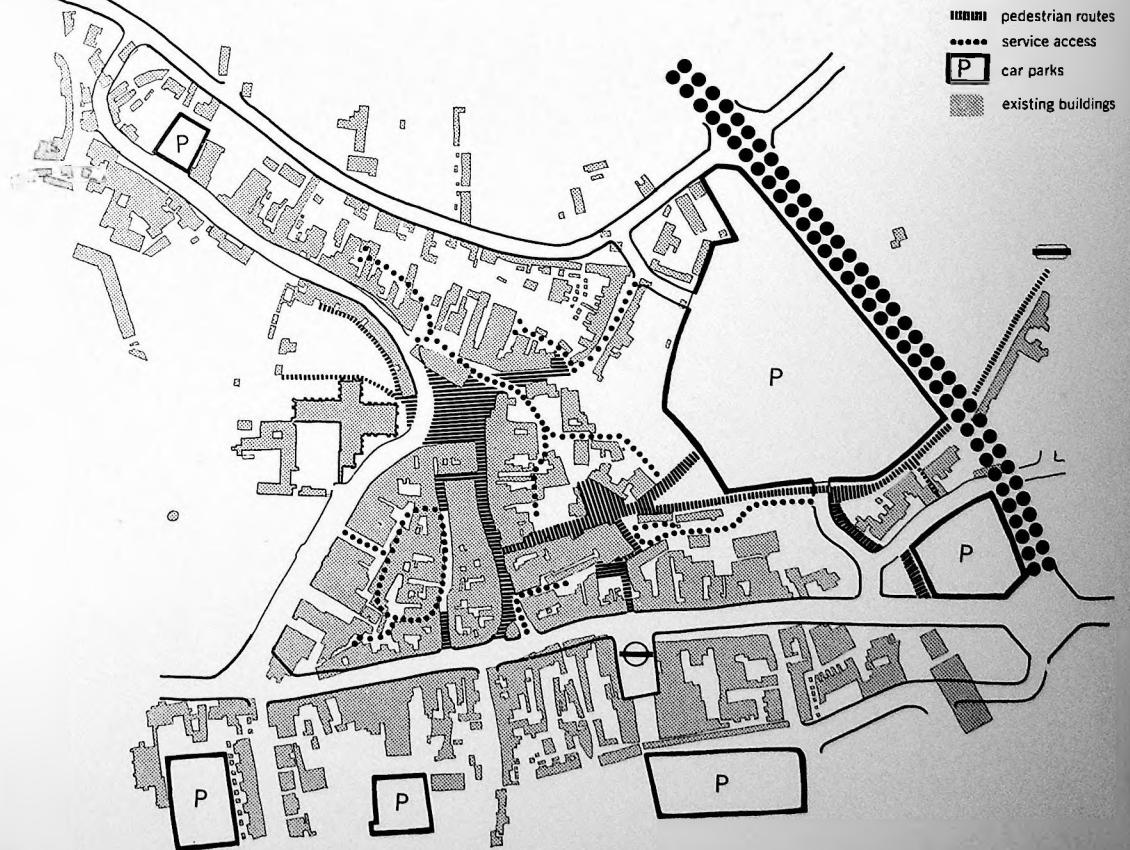




74 Hexham



- ||||| pedestrian routes
- service access
- [P] car parks
- [diagonal lines] existing buildings



6 The basic plan

The success of town centre redevelopment depends in the end even more on the soundness of the underlying plan than on the quality of the individual buildings. This final section shows how all the diverse threads illustrated in this bulletin have to be pulled together in an overall plan prepared at the outset.

The examples are taken from towns of different types and size – including a small historic town, a medium sized country town, a large town of regional importance, a blitzed city and two New Towns.

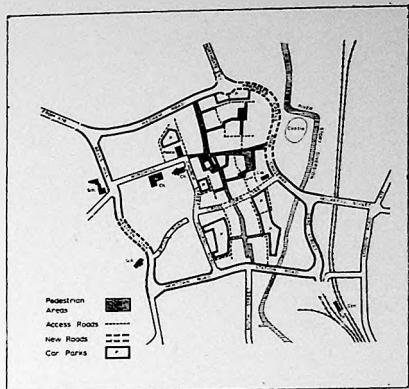
The elements of town centre planning can be seen most clearly in the New Town plans, but similar planning principles are embodied in the plans for adaptation and rebuilding in the older towns. At Hexham, for example, provision is made for the gradual change to pedestrian shopping streets and rear service access, without the need for any radical reconstruction. It is a good example of rethinking the town centre rather than rebuilding it. The plan for Bishops Stortford approaches the problem in the same way, but has to provide for substantial expansion in the town centre without destroying its original charm and character. The plans for Coventry and Kingston-upon-Thames on the other hand involve major reconstruction.

The technique of preparing a Town Centre map is explained in the first planning bulletin *Town Centres—Approach to Renewal*.* The following selection of maps and photographs of models simply illustrates the planning process at work in towns of different types. In short, it shows how all the elements of town centre redevelopment fit together in the current practice of town centre planning.

Hexham, Northumberland (74-75)

A small market town of about 9,000 people but with a fairly wide hinterland. Radical redevelopment was neither possible nor desirable in this case and the solution, which should suffice in a town of slow and natural expansion, is to divert through traffic from the centre; to provide adequate rear service to shops and other buildings (this can take place in phases as redevelopment occurs piecemeal), and ample car parking areas, thus making it possible to retain the existing streets and market place for pedestrians only. The visual scale of the town centre streets is in keeping with the pedestrian and the physical scale of the town lends itself to this relatively simple and easily implemented scheme.

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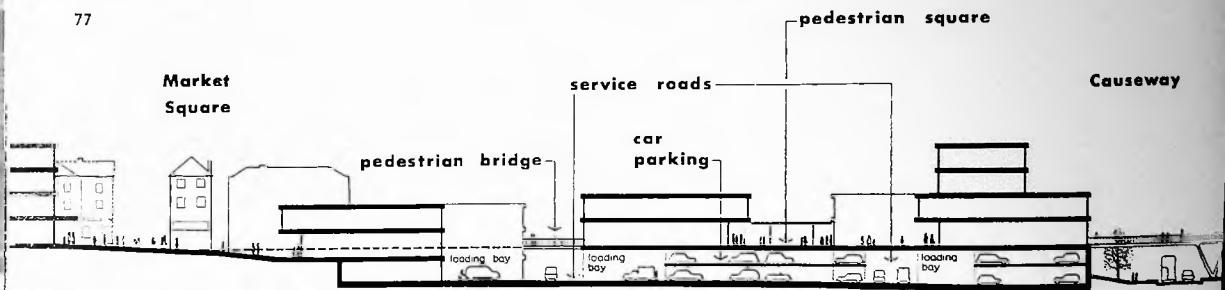


76

Bishops Stortford, Herts (76-78)

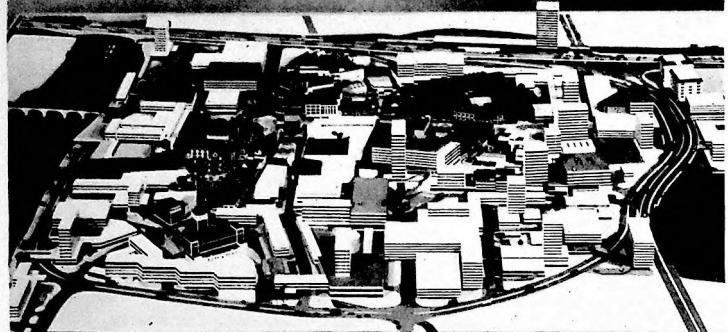
A flourishing and expanding town of some 19,000 people. The plan provides for improvement in the circulation systems, diversion of through traffic, together with the closure of existing streets to traffic leaving them free for pedestrians to shop safely. Provision is made for an increase in shopping floor area by broadening the shape of the central area rather than extending its present linear form. Rear service to the shops and other buildings is ingeniously contrived and in one place the river Stort is diverted and the old river bed used for service access. Adequate car parks are planned and natural falls in the land are used to form a multi-level system in the centre, with pedestrians on the upper deck and cars and service vehicles on two levels below.

77



78



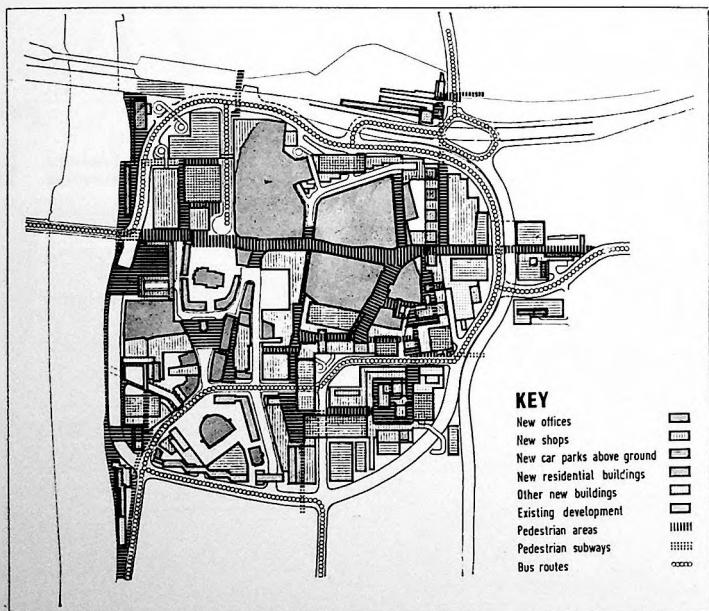


79

Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey (79-80)

An important regional town with a population of only 37,000 but serving as a major business, shopping and administrative centre for a wide area. There are several large obsolescent areas in the centre, some owned by the Kingston Corporation: there are acute problems of traffic congestion and car parking, and pressure for large-scale private enterprise redevelopment. In short, although there are serious problems there are also valuable opportunities. The plan, which has not yet been approved by the Minister, is intended to provide a framework within which public and private redevelopment can be co-ordinated and encouraged. It includes proposals for progressive segregation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic: car parking for 10,000 cars with easy access to the centre: special provision for bus passengers: a system of approach roads meeting a local ring road, with through traffic carried on separate routes. Proposals are also made for further growth in the centre and for preserving and enhancing its special features such as the market area, open spaces and the river frontage.

80





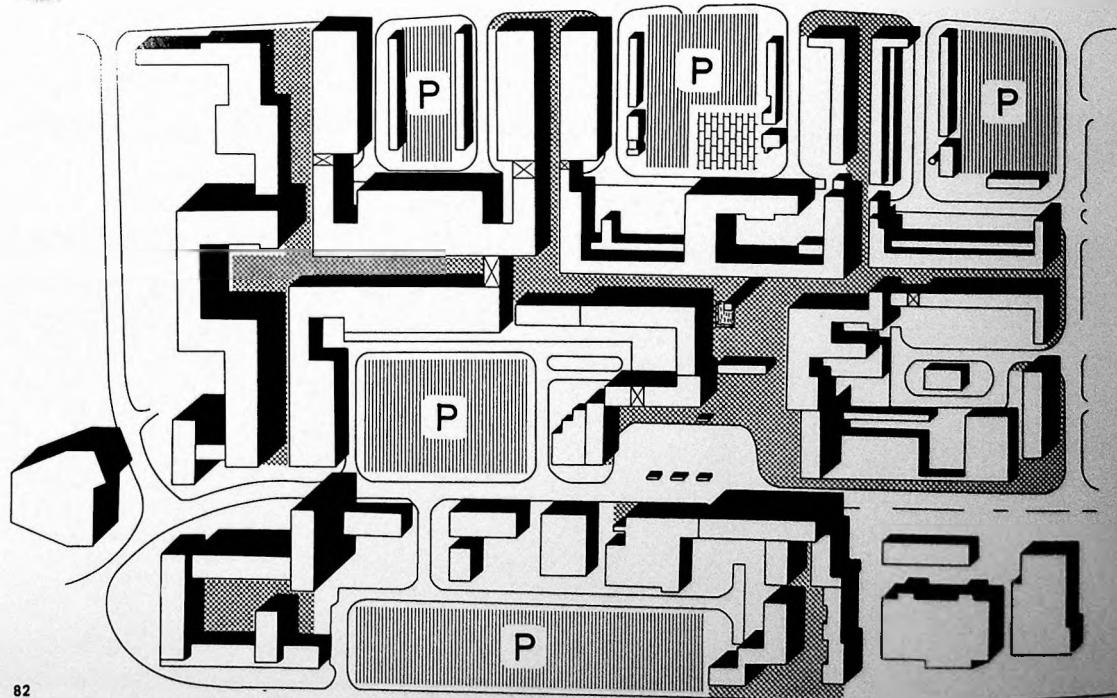
81

Stevenage, Herts (81-82)

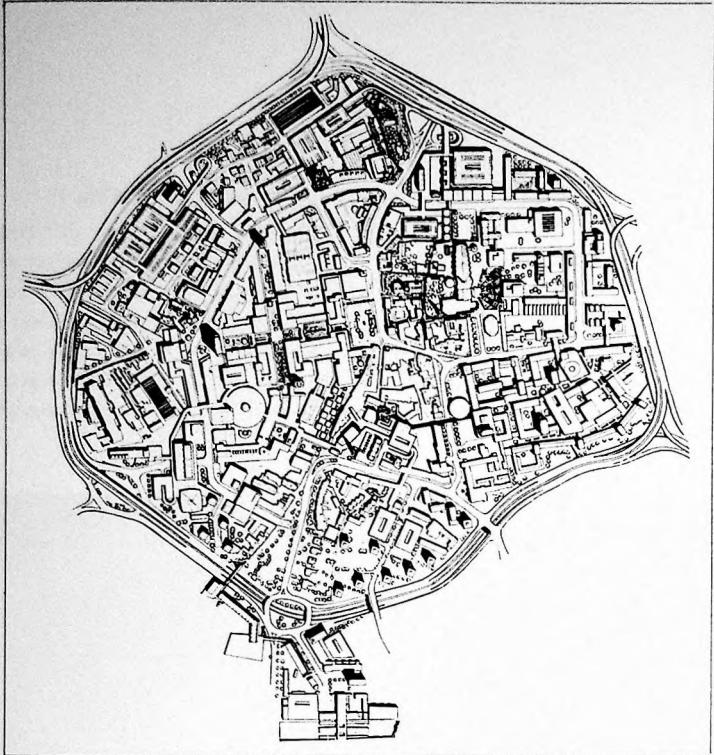
One of the early New Towns, Stevenage was a pioneer of modern town centre planning. The pedestrian shopping streets are narrow and compact, with canopies for all-weather shopping. The ground level car parks are strategically sited with easy access to the centre. Conversion to multi-storey car parks will be possible as demand increases. Rear service access is provided to all buildings. The town is planned so that through traffic and local cross-town traffic do not need to enter the town centre, which is designed specifically for traffic that has business there.

car parks

pedestrian areas



82

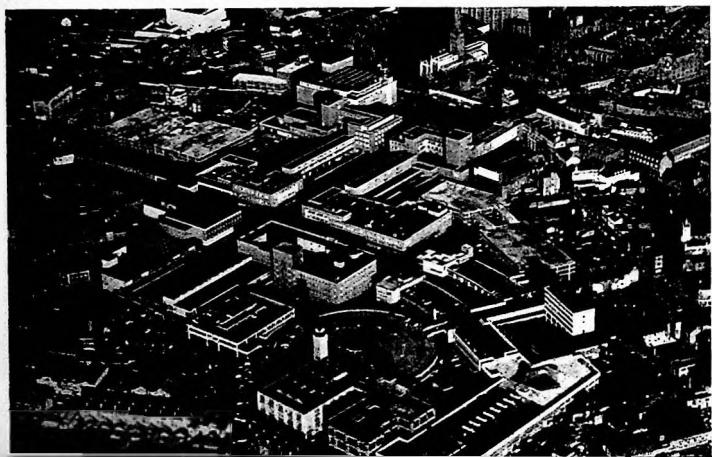


83

Coventry, Warwickshire (83-84)

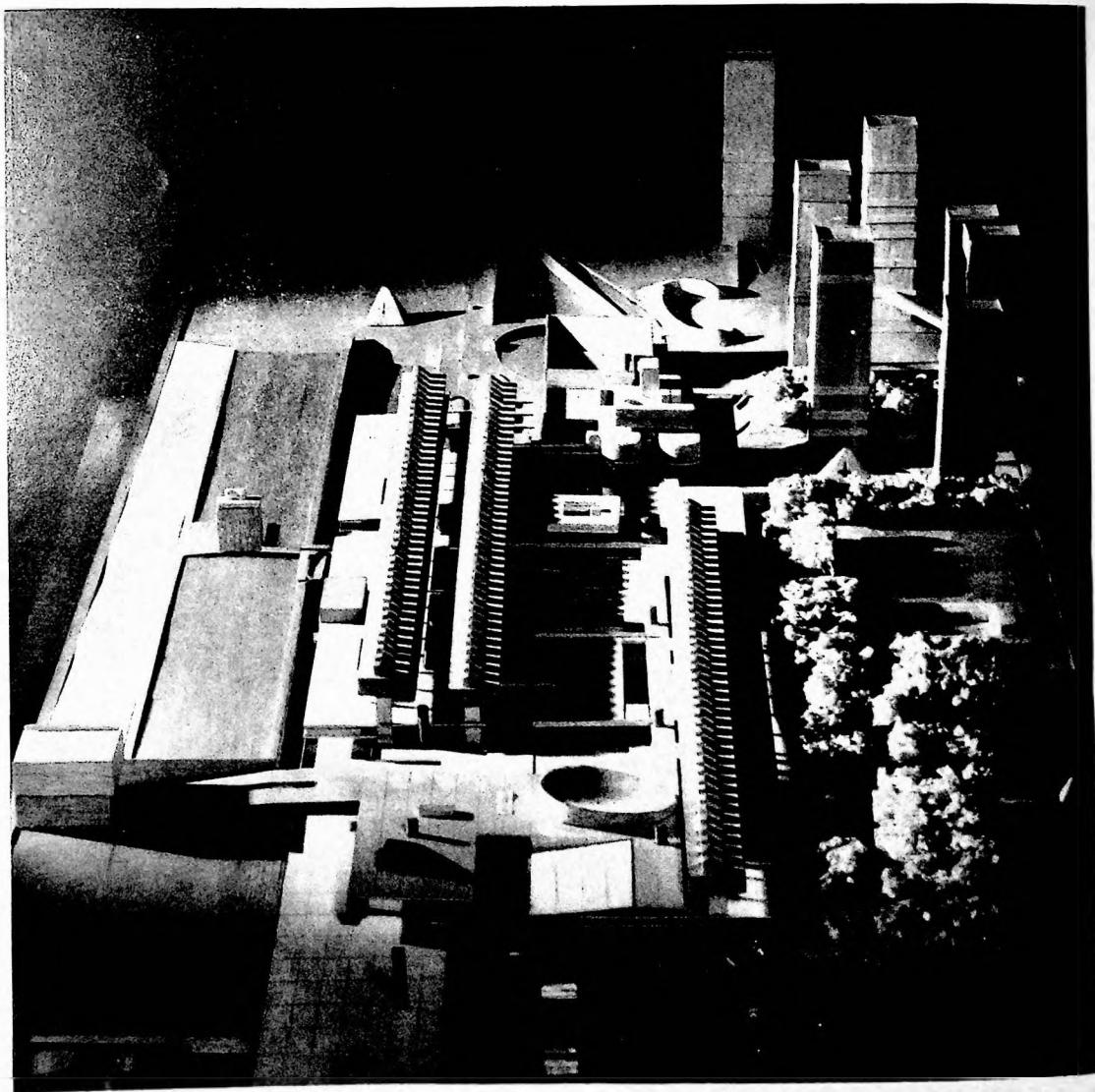
Coventry, with a population over 300,000, has shown how the principles of pedestrian/vehicular segregation can be applied to the centre of a large town, including an inner ring road, secondary circulatory system within the centre, all servicing separate from car parking, and a system of linked roof top car parking with automatic control. This is planning for the levels of traffic and car ownership which will become general over the next ten years or so.

84



Cumbernauld, Scotland (85)

The plan for the centre of Cumbernauld New Town (planned population 70,000) envisages a completely new form of town centre planned on a multi-level basis from the outset. The first stage is now being built; the design differs in detail from that shown in the model. Such a system may only be possible where a new centre is being developed as part of a planned community, but it can be viewed as a logical extension of the principles already tested in the earlier town centre schemes.



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